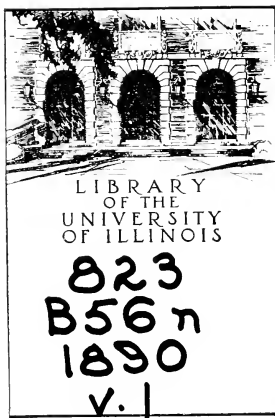


THE NEW
PRINCE FORTUNATUS

WILLIAM BLACK

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To Colin Hunter
from his friend William Black.

Brighton Jan 1890.



THE NEW PRINCE FORTUNATUS.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF

“A PRINCESS OF THULE,” “MACLEOD OF DARE,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A REHEARSAL	1
II. THE GREAT GOD PAN... ..	32
III. NINA	65
IV. COUNTRY AND TOWN	101
V. WARS AND RUMOURS	136
VI. A DEPARTURE	169
VII. IN STRATHAIVRON	202
VIII. THE TWELFTH	235
IX. VENATOR IMMOR	273



THE NEW PRINCE FORTUNATUS.



CHAPTER I.

A REHEARSAL.

WHEN the curtain fell on the last act of *The Squire's Daughter*, the comedy-opera that had taken all musical London by storm, a tall and elegant young English matron and her still taller brother rose from their places in the private box they had been occupying, and made ready to depart; and he had just assisted her to put on her long-skirted coat of rose-red plush when an attendant made his appearance.

“ Mr. Moore's compliments, your ladyship, and will you please to step this way ? ”

The box was close to the stage. Lady Adela Cunyngham and her brother Lord Rockminster followed their guide through a narrow little door and almost at once found themselves in the wings,

amid the usual motley crowd of gas-men, scene-shifters, dressers, and the like. But the company were still fronting the footlights; for there had been a general recall, and the curtain had gone up again; and probably, during this brief second of scrutiny, it may have seemed odd to these two strangers to find themselves looking not at rows of smiling faces on the stage but at the backs of the heads of the performers. However, the curtain once more came down; the great wedding-party in the Squire's hall grew suddenly quite business-like and went their several ways as if they had no longer any concern with each other; and then it was that the Squire's daughter herself—a piquant little person she was, in a magnificent costume of richly-flowered white satin, and with a portentous head-gear of powdered hair and brilliants and strings of pearls—was brought forward by a handsome young gentleman who wore a tied wig, a laced coat and ruffles, satin knee-breeches, shining silken stockings, and silver-buckled shoes.

“Lady Adela,” said he, “let me introduce you to Miss Burgoyne. Miss Burgoyne has been kind enough to say she will take you into her room for a little while, until I get off my war-paint. I shan't keep you more than a few minutes.”

“It is very good of you,” said the tall young matron in the crimson coat to this gorgeous little white bride, whose lips were brilliant with cherry-paste, and whose bright and frank eyes were surrounded by such a mighty mass of make-up.

“Not at all,” she answered, pleasantly enough, and therewith she led the way down some steps into a long white-tiled corridor from which branched the various dressing-rooms. “I’m afraid I can’t give you any tea now; but there’s some lemonade, of my own making—it has become very popular in the theatre—you would hardly believe the number of callers I have of an evening.”

By this time Lionel Moore, who was responsible for these strangers being in the theatre, had gone quickly off to his own dressing-room to change his attire, so that when the two ladies reached a certain half-open door where the prima donna’s maid was waiting for her, Lord Rockminster naturally hung back and would have remained without. Miss Burgoyne instantly turned to him.

“Oh, but you may come in too!” she said with great complaisance.

Somewhat timorously he followed these two into a prettily-furnished little sitting-room, where he

was bidden to take a seat, and regale himself with lemonade, if he was so minded; and then Miss Burgoyne drew aside the curtain of an inner apartment, and said to her other guest——

“*You* may come in here, if you like. Mr. Moore said you wished to know about stage make-up and that kind of thing—I will show you all the dreadful secrets—Jane!” Thereupon these three disappeared behind the curtain, and Lord Rockminster was left alone.

But Lord Rockminster liked being left alone. He was a great thinker, who rarely revealed his thoughts, but who was quite happy in possessing them. He could sit for an hour at a club-window, calmly gazing out into the street, and be perfectly content. It is true that the pale tobacco-tinge that overspread the young man’s fair complexion seemed to speak of an out-of-door life; but he had long ago emancipated himself from the tyranny of field-sports. That thralldom had begun early with him, as with most of his class. He had hardly been out of his Eton jacket when gillies and water-bailiffs got hold of him, and made him thrash salmon-pools with a seventeen-foot rod until his back was breaking; and then keepers and foresters had taken possession of him, and compelled him

to crawl for miles up wet gullies and across peat-hags, and then put a rifle in his hand, expecting him to hit a bewildering object on the other side of a corrie when, as a matter of fact, his heart was like to burst with excitement and fear. But the young man had some strength of character. He rebelled; he refused to be driven like a slave any longer; he struck for freedom and won it. There was still much travelling to be encountered; but when he had got that over, when he had seen everything and done everything, and there was nothing more to do or to see, then he became master of himself, and conducted himself accordingly. Contemplation, accompanied by a cigarette, was now his chief good. What his meditations were no one knew, but they sufficed unto himself. He had attained Nirvana. He lived in a region of perpetual thought.

But there was one active quality that Lord Rockminster certainly did possess: he was a most devoted brother, as all the town knew. He was never tired of going about with his three beautiful sisters, or with any one of them; he would fetch and carry for them with the most amiable assiduity; "Rock" they called him, as if he were a retriever. Then the fact that they followed very different

pursuits made all the greater demand on his consideration. His youngest sister, Lady Rosamund Bourne, painted indefatigably in both water and oils, and had more than once exhibited in Suffolk Street; Lady Sybil devoted herself to music, and was a well-known figure at charitable concerts; while the eldest sister, Lady Adela, considered literature and the drama as more particularly under her protection, nor had she ceased to interest herself in these graceful arts when she married Sir Hugh Cunyngham, of the Braes, that famous breeder of polled cattle. The natural consequence of all this was that Lord Rockminster found himself called to a never-ending series of concerts, theatres, private views, and the like, and always with one or other of his beautiful, tall sisters as his companion; while on a certain occasion (for it was whispered that Lady Adela Cunyngham was engaged in the composition of a novel, and her brother was the soul of good-nature) he had even gone the length of asking a publisher to dine at his club. And here he was seated in an actress's room, alone, while his sister was inspecting powder-puffs, washes, patches, and paste jewellery; and not only that, but they were about to take an actor home to supper with them.

What he thought about it all he never said. He sate and stroked his small yellow moustache; his eyes were absent; and on his handsome, almost Greek, features there dwelt a perfect and continuous calm.

Presently the door was opened, and the smart-looking young baritone who had stolen away the hearts of half the women in London made his appearance. He was a young fellow of about eight and twenty, pleasant-featured, his complexion almost colourless, his eyes grey with dark lashes, his eyebrows also dark. In figure he was slight and wiry rather than muscular; but where he gave evidence of strength was in his magnificent throat and in the set of his head and shoulders. It may be added that he possessed, what few stage-singers appear to possess, a remarkably well-formed leg—a firm-knit calf tapering to a small ankle and a shapely foot; but as he had now doffed his professional silken stockings and silver-buckled shoes for ordinary evening wear, his merits in this respect were mostly concealed.

No sooner had he begun to talk to Lord Rockminster than the sound of his voice summoned forth from the inner apartment Lady Adela, who, with many expressions of thanks, bade good-night

to the prima donna, and put herself under charge of the young baritone.

"My sisters are at the Mellords' to-night," said she, as she accompanied him along the corridor and up the steps and through the now almost deserted wings. "They were dining there, and we left them as we came to the theatre, and promised to pick them up on our way home. There will be a bit of a crush, I suppose: you won't mind coming in for a few minutes, will you, Mr. Moore?"

"I don't know Mrs. Mellord," said he, with becoming modesty.

"But everybody knows you—that is the great point," said this tall young Englishwoman, who looked very gracious and charming, and who, when she turned to talk to her companion, had a quick, responsive smile ever ready in her clear, intelligent, grey-blue eyes. "Oh, yes, you must come. It is one of the prettiest houses in London; and Mrs. Mellord is one of the nicest women. We will get Sybil and Rose away as soon as we can; and I shouldn't at all wonder if we found Georgie Lestrangle and her brother there too. Oh, almost certain, I should say. Then we could carry them off to supper, and after that *Pastora* might try over

her duet with *Damon*. But as regards the Mel-lords, Mr. Moore," said she, with a pleasant smile, as he handed her into her brougham, which had been brought round to the stage-door, "I shall consider you to be under my protection, and I will take care no one shall ask you to sing."

"But you know, Lady Adela, I am always delighted to sing for any friend of yours," said he, promptly enough; and then, when he and Lord Rockminster had entered the carriage, and the footman had shut the door and got on the box, away they drove through the busy midnight world of London.

It did not take them long to get from the New Theatre to the house of the famous Academician; and here, late as it was, they found plenty of people still arriving, a small crowd of onlookers scanning the various groups as they crossed the pavement. On this hot night in May, it seemed pleasantly cool to get into the great hall of white and black marble, where the miniature lake, on which floated an alabaster swan, was all banked round with flowers; and when Lady Adela had dispossessed herself of her long plush coat, it was evident she had dressed for the reception before going to the theatre, for now she appeared in a costume of

silver-grey satin with a very considerable train, while there were diamond stars in her light brown hair, and at her bosom a bunch of deep crimson roses. At the head of the stairs they encountered Mrs. Mellord, who received the young baritone with the most marked kindness. Indeed, he seemed to be known to a considerable number of the people who were assembled in these spacious rooms of white and gold; while those who were not personally acquainted with him easily recognised him, for were not his photographs in every stationer's window in London? The Ladies Sybil and Rosamund Bourne they found in the studio, talking to the great Academician himself. These two young ladies were even taller, as they likewise were fairer in complexion, than their married sister: moreover, they were much more dignified in demeanour than she was, though that may have merely arisen from maidenly reserve. But when Mr. Mellord exhibited at the Royal Academy his much-talked-of picture of the three sisters, most people seemed to think that though the two younger ladies might have carried off the palm for their handsome, pale, regularly-cut features and their calm, observant eyes, there was something in the bright, vivacious look of the eldest that out-

weighed these advantages ; while in society, and especially as a hostess in her own house, the charm of Lady Adela's manner, and her quick, sympathetic, engaging ways made her a universal favourite. And if one were in amazement to ask how it came about that a woman so alert and intelligent, so conversant with the world, so ready to note the ridiculous side of things, could not understand what a poor and lamentable figure she made as an amateur authoress ? But had the Lady Sybil any less confidence in her musical attainments, when she would undertake to play a duet with one of the most distinguished of professional musicians, she on the violin, he at the piano ? And here, at this very moment, was Lady Rosamund talking to by far and away the greatest painter in England, and there was a picture before them on an easel, and she was saying to him with perfect coolness—

“ Why, I see you use cadmium yellow, Mr. Mel-lord ! I *never* do.”

Somehow an impression got abroad through these brilliant rooms that Mr. Moore was going to sing ; and at length Mrs. Mellord came to the young man and frankly preferred her request.

“ Oh, yes,” said he, most good-naturedly.

“The serenade?” she ventured to hint.

“Oh, not the serenade!” said he, with a laugh. “Every butcher’s boy in the streets whistles it.”

“All England is singing it—and a good thing too,” she made answer; and then she said, with some emphasis: “I am sure no one rejoices more than myself at the great popularity of *The Squire’s Daughter*. I am very glad to see that a comedy-opera may be based on the best traditions of English music; and I hope we shall have a great deal less of the Offenbach tinkle-tankle.”

“The serenade, if you like, then,” said he, with careless good-humour: what did it matter to him?

“And whom shall I get to play an accompaniment for you?”

“Oh, you needn’t trouble—I can do that for myself——”

“But you must make one young lady supremely happy,” said she, with insidious flattery.

He glanced round the studio.

“I see Miss Lestrangle over there—she has played it for me before—without the music, I mean.”

“Then I’ll go and fetch her,” said the inde-

fatigable hostess ; and now everybody seemed to know that Mr. Lionel Moore was about to sing "The Starry Night."

Miss Georgie Lestrangle was no sooner appealed to than she came through the crowd, smiling and laughing. She was an exceedingly pretty lass, with fresh-complexioned cheeks, a pert and attractive nose, a winsome mouth, and merry blue eyes that were hardly made grave by the pince-nez that she habitually wore. She was very prettily dressed, too—in blue and silver brocade, with a high Medici collar of silver lace, puffed sleeves with twisted cords of silver, and silver fillets binding the abundant masses of her ruddy-golden hair. She sate down at the piano, and the first notes of the accompaniment deepened the silence that now prevailed not only in this big studio but throughout the communicating rooms.

Probably there was not a human being in the place who had not heard this serenade sung a dozen times over, for it was the most popular air of the most popular piece then being played in London ; but there was some kind of novelty in listening to the same notes that had thrilled through the theatre (rather, that had sent their passionate appeal up to a certain mysterious bal-

cony, in the dim moonlight of the stage) now pulsating through the hushed silence of these modern rooms. Lionel Moore was not a baritone of altogether rare and exceptional gifts, otherwise he might hardly have been content with even the popularity and the substantial rewards of comic opera; but he had a very excellent voice for all that, of high range, and with a resonant and finely sympathetic *timbre* that seemed easily to find its way (according to all accounts) to the feminine heart. And the music of this serenade was really admirable, of subtle and delicate quality, and yet full of the simplest melody, and perhaps none the less to be appreciated that it seemed to suggest a careful study of the best English composers. The words were conventional enough, of course; but then the whole story of *The Squire's Daughter* was as artificial as the wigs and powder and patches of the performers; and even now, when *Harry Thornhill*, bereft of all his gay silk and lace and ruffles and become plain Mr. Lionel Moore, in ordinary evening dress, sang to Miss Georgie Lestrangle's accompaniment, the crowd did not think of the words—they were entranced by the music. *The starry night*—this is how *Harry Thornhill* in the opera addresses

Grace Mainwaring, he standing in the moonlit garden and looking up to her window—

*The starry night brings me no rest ;
My ardent love now stands confessed ;
Appear, my sweet, and shame the skies,
That have no splendour,
That have no splendour like thine eyes !*

The serenade was followed by a general murmur of approbation rather than by any loud applause ; but the pretty Mrs. Mellord came up to the singer, and was most profuse of thanks. Prudently, however, he moved away from the piano, being accompanied by Miss Georgie Lestrangle, who seemed rather pleased with the prominence this position gave her ; and very soon a surreptitious message reached them both that they were wanted below. When they went down into the hall they found that Lady Adela had got her party collected, including Miss Lestrangle's brother Percy ; thereupon the four ladies got into the brougham and drove off ; while the three gentlemen proposed to follow on foot, and have a cigarette the while. It was a pleasantly warm night, and they had no further to go than Sir Hugh Cunyngham's house, which is one of the large garden-surrounded mansions on the summit of Campden Hill.

When at length they arrived there, and had

entered by the wooden gate, the semicircular carriage-drive, lit by two solitary lamps, and the front of the house itself, half-hidden among the black trees, seemed somewhat sombre and repellent at this silent hour of the morning; but they found a more cheerful radiance streaming out from the hall-door, which had been left open for them; and when they went into the large dining-room, where the ladies had already assembled, there was no lack of either light or colour there, for all the candles were ablaze, and the long table was brilliant with silver and Venetian glass and flowers. And indeed this proved to be a very merry and talkative supper-party; for as soon as supper was served, the servants were sent off to bed; Lord Rockminster constituted himself butler, and Percy Lestrangle handed round the pheasants' eggs and asparagus and such things; so that there was no alien ear in the room. Lionel Moore, being less familiar with the house, was exempted from these duties; in truth, it was rather the women-folk who waited upon him—and petted him as he was used to be petted, wherever that fortunate young man happened to go.

However, it was not supper that was chiefly occupying the attention of this band of eager

chatterers (from whom the silent Lord Rockminster, walking gravely round the table with a large jug of champagne-cup in his hand, must honourably be distinguished) it was the contemplated production of a little musical entertainment called *The Chaplet*, by Dr. Boyce, which they were about to attempt, out-of-doors, on some afternoon still to be fixed, and before a select concourse of friends. And the most vivacious of the talkers was the red-headed and merry-eyed young maiden in blue and silver and brocade, who seemed incapable of keeping her rosebud of a mouth closed for more than a minute at a time.

“I do think it’s awfully hard on me,” she was protesting. “Look how I’m handicapped! Everybody knows that *Pastora* was played by Kitty Clive; and everybody will say, ‘That Lestrangle girl has cheek, hasn’t she?—thinks she can play Kitty Clive’s parts!’ And you know *Pastora* is always calling attention to her fascinating appearance.”

“Georgie, you’re fishing for compliments!” the young matron said, severely.

“No, I’m not, Adela,” said Miss Lestrangle, who, indeed, looked as charming as any Kitty Clive could ever have done. “Then there’s another

thing: fancy my having to sing a duet with Mr. Moore! It's all very well for you to sing a song off your own bat—"

"That *would* be difficult, Georgie," Lady Adela observed.

"Oh, you know what I mean. But when you come to sing in conjunction with an artist like Mr. Moore, what then? They will say it is mere presumption, when my little squeak of a voice gets drowned altogether."

"If you give any weight to a professional opinion, Miss Lestrangle," the young baritone said, "I can assure you, you sing your part in that duet—or in anything else I've heard you sing—very well indeed. Very well indeed."

"Ah, now Georgie's happy," said Lady Adela, with a laugh, as the blushing damsel cast down her eyes. "Well, I propose that we all go into the drawing-room, and we'll hear for ourselves how *Pastora* and *Damon* sing together. You may make as much noise as ever you like; the children are in Hampshire; Hugh is in Scotland; the servants are out of hearing; and our neighbours are a long way off."

This suggestion, coming from the lady of the house, was of the nature of a command; and so

they leisurely trooped into the great drawing-room, where the candles were still burning. But there was something else than these artificial lights that attracted the sharp eyes of Miss Georgie Lestrangle the moment she entered this new apartment. There was a curious, wan kind of colour about the curtains and the French windows that did not seem natural to the room. She walked quickly forward, drew the lace hangings aside, and then suddenly she exclaimed—

“Why, it’s almost daylight! Look here, Adela, why shouldn’t we have a rehearsal of the whole piece, from end to end—a real rehearsal, this time, on the lawn, and Rose can tell us all how we are to stand, and Mr. Moore will show us what we should do besides merely speaking the lines?”

This bold proposal was greeted with general acclaim, and instantly there was a bustle of preparation. Lady Sybil began to tune her violin by the side of the open piano; Lady Rosamund, who was at once scene-painter and stage-manager, as it were, got out some sheets of drawing-paper on which she had sketched the various groups; and Lady Adela brought forth the MS. books of the play, which had been prepared under the careful (and necessary) supervision of Lionel Moore.

“Rockminster will have to figure as the audience,” his eldest sister said, as she was looping up her long train of silver-grey satin preparatory to going out.

“That is a part *I* could play to perfection,” put in Miss Lestrangle’s brother.

“Oh, no,” Lady Adela remonstrated. “You may be wanted for *Palæmon*. You see, this is how it stands. The young shepherd was originally played at Drury Lane by a boy—and in Dublin by an actress: it is a boy’s part, indeed. Well, you know, we thought Cis Yorke would snap at it; and she was eager enough at first; but”—and here Lady Adela smiled demurely—“I think her courage gave way. The boy’s dress looked charming as Rose sketched it for her—and the long cloak made it quite proper, you know—and very picturesque, too—but—but I think she’s frightened. We can’t count on her. So we may have to call on you for *Palæmon*, Mr. Lestrangle.”

“And I have taken the liberty of cutting out the song, for it’s rather stupid,” said Lionel Moore, “so you’ve only got a few lines to repeat.”

“The fewer the better,” replied Mr. Percy Lestrangle, who was possibly right in considering that, with his far from regular features and his

red hair and moustache, his appearance as a handsome young swain should not have too much prominence given it.

Notwithstanding that it had been Miss Le-strange's audacious proposal that they should go masquerading in the open air, she was a wise young virgin, and she took care before going out to thrust a soft silk handkerchief into the square opening of her dress; the Ladies Sybil and Rosamund followed her example by drawing a lace scarf round their neck and shoulders; it was the young matron who was reprehensibly careless, and who, when the French windows were thrown open, went forth boldly, and without any wrap at all, into the cool air of the dawn. But for a second, as they stood on the little stone balcony above the steps leading down to the garden, this group of revellers were struck silent. The world looked so strange around them. In the mysterious grey light, that had no sort of kindly warmth in it, the grass of the lawn and the foliage of the surrounding trees seemed coldly and intensely green; and cold and intense, with no richness of hue at all, were the colours of the flowers in the various plots and beds. Not a bird chirped as yet. Not a leaf stirred. But in this ghostly twilight the solitary

gas-lamps were beginning to show pale; and in the southern heavens the silver sickle of the moon, stealing over to the west, seemed to be taking the night with it, and leaving those faintly-lilac skies to welcome the uprising of the new day.

At first, indeed, there was something curiously uncanny—something unearthly and phantasmal almost—in the spectacle of these figures, the women in white, the men in black, moving through this wan light; and their voices sounded strangely in the dead silence; but ere long a soft saffron tinge began to show itself in the east; one or two scraps of cloud in the violent skies caught a faint touch of the coming dawn; there was a more generous tone on the masses of foliage, on the flower-beds, and on the grass; and now the cheerful chirping of the birds had begun among the leaves. And what more beautiful surroundings could have been imagined for the production of any pastoral entertainment? The wide lawn was bounded on one side by a dense thicket of elms and limes and chestnuts, and on the other by a tall dark hedge of holly; while here and there was a weeping-willow round the stem of which a circular seat had been constructed, the pendulous branches enclosing a sort of rustic bower. As this

fantastic performance went forward, the skies overhead slowly became more luminous; there was a sense of warmth and clear daylight beginning to tell; the birds were singing and chattering and calling everywhere; and the sweet, pure air of the morning, as it stirred, and no more than stirred, the trembling leaves, brought with it a scent of mignonette, that seemed to speak of the coming of June.

Laura, in the person of Lady Adela Cunyngham, had reproached the faithless *Damon* (who was no other than Mr. Lionel Moore)—

‘*Ungrateful Damon, is it come to this?
Are these the happy Scenes of promis’d Bliss?
Ne’er hope, vain Laura, future Peace to prove;
Content ne’er harbours with neglected Love.*’

—and *Damon* had replied (not mumbling his lines, as a privileged actor sometimes does at rehearsal, but addressing them properly to the hapless *Laura*)—

‘*Consider, Fair, the ever-restless Pow’r,
Shifts with the Breeze, and changes with the Hour:
Above Restraint, he scorns a fixt Abode,
And on his silken Plumes flies forth the rambling God.*’

Then Lady Sybil took out her violin from its case and drew the bow across the strings.

“We’ll let you off the song, if you like,

Mr. Moore," Lady Adela said to the young baritone, but in a very half-hearted kind of way.

"Oh, no," said he, pleasantly, "perhaps this may be my only rehearsal."

"The audience," observed Lord Rockminster, who, at a little distance, was lying back in a garden-chair, smoking a cigarette, "the audience would distinctly prefer to have the song sung."

Lady Sybil again gave him the key-note from the violin; and without further accompaniment he thus addressed his forsaken sweetheart—

*'You say at your Feet that I wept in Despair,
And vow'd that no Angel was ever so fair;
How could you believe all the Nonsense I spoke?
What know we of Angels, I meant it in Joke,
I meant it in Joke,
What know we of Angels, I meant it in Joke.'*

When, in his rich, vibrating notes he had sung the two verses, all the ladies rewarded him by clapping their hands, which was an exceedingly wrong thing to do, considering that they formed no part of the audience. Then *Damon* says—

*'To-day Demætus gave a rural Treat,
And I once more my chosen Friends must meet:
Farewell, sweet Damsel, and remember this,
Dull Repetition deadens all our Bliss.'*

And *Laura* sadly answers—

*'Where baleful Cyprus forms a gloomy Shade,
And yelling Spectres haunt the dreary Glade ;
Unknown to all, my lonesome Steps I'll bend ;
There weep my Suff'rings, and my Fate attend.'*

Here *Laura* ought to sing the song '*Vain is every fond Endearour ;*' but Lady Adela said to the violinist—

"No, never mind, Syb ; no one wants to hear *me* sing, until the necessity of the case arises. Let's get on to the feast: I think that will be very popular ; for we must have lots of shepherds and shepherdesses ; and the people will be delighted to recognise their friends. Where's your sketch, Rose ? I would have groups round each of the willows, and occasional figures coming backwards and forwards through those rhododendrons."

"You must leave the principal performers plenty of stage," Lionel Moore interposed, laughing. "You mustn't hem us in with supers, however picturesque their dress may be."

And so they went on discussing their arrangements, while the refulgent day was everywhere declaring itself, though as yet no sound of the far-off world could reach this isolated garden. Nor was there any direct sunshine falling into it ; but a beautiful warmth of colour now shone on the young green of the elms and chestnuts and hawthorns,

and on one or two tall-branching, trembling poplars just coming into leaf; while the tulip-beds—the stars, the crescents, the ovals, and squares—were each a mass of brilliant vermilion, of rose, of pale lemon, of crimson-and-orange, or clearest gold. This new-found dawn seemed wholly to belong to the birds. Perhaps it was their universal chirping and carolling that concealed the distant echo of the high-ways; for surely the heavily-laden wains were now making in for Covent-Garden? At all events there was nothing here but this continuous bird clamour; and the voices of these modern nymphs and swains as they went this way and that over the velvet-smooth lawn.

And now the bewitching *Pastora* appears upon the scene (but would Mrs. Clive have worn a gold pince-nez at rehearsal?) and she has just quarrelled with her lover *Palæmon*.

*‘ Insulting Boy! I’ll tear him from my mind ;
Ah! wou’d my Fortune cou’d a Husband find :
And just in Time, young Damon comes this Way,
A handsome Youth he is, and rich, they say.’*

The butterfly-hearted Damon responds at once—

*‘ Vouchsafe, sweet Maid, to hear a wretched Swain,
Who lost in Wonder, hugs the pleasing Chain ;*

*For you in Sighs I hail the rising Day ;
 To you at Eve I sing the lovesick Lay ;
 Then take my Love, my Homage as your due,
 The Devil's in her, if all this won't do.* [Aside.

It must be confessed that the pretty and smiling and blushing Miss Georgie Lestrangle looked just a little self-conscious as she had to listen to this extremely frank declaration ; but she had the part of the coquettish *Pastora* to play ; and *Pastora*, as soon as she discovers that *Damon* has no thought of marriage, naturally declines to have anything to do with him. And here came in the duet which had first suggested this escapade :

DAMON. *From Flow'r to Flow'r his Joy to change
 Flits yonder wanton Bee ;
 From Fair to Fair thus will I range,
 And I'll be ever free.
 From Fair to Fair thus will I range,
 And I'll be ever free.*

PASTORA. *Yon little Birds attentive view,
 That hop from Tree to Tree ;
 I'll copy them, I'll copy you,
 For I'll be ever free.*

DUETTO. *Then let's divide to East and West,
 Since we shall ne'er agree ;
 And try who keeps their Promise best
 And who's the longest free.
 Let's try who keeps their Promise best
 And who's the longest free.*

And again the audience made bold to clap their

hands; for Miss Georgie Lestrangle, despite her self-depreciation, sang very well indeed; and of course Lionel Moore knew how to moderate his voice, so that the combination was entirely pleasing. The further progress of the little comedy needs not to be described here; it has only to be said that the injured *Laura* is in the end restored to her repentant lover; and that a final duet between her and *Damon* closes the piece with the most praiseworthy sentiments—

*‘For their Honour and Faith be our Virgins renown’d,
Nor false to his Vows one young Shepherd be found;
Be their Moments all guid’d by Virtue and Truth,
To preserve in their Age what they gain’d in their Youth,
To preserve in their Age what they gain’d in their Youth.’*

Lord Rockminster rose from his chair, stretched his long legs, and threw away his cigarette.

“Very well done,” said he, slowly. “Congratulate all of you.”

“This is the first time I ever saw Rockminster sit out a morning performance,” observed Percy Lestrangle, with a playful grin.

“As for you young things,” the mistress of the house said to her girl-guests, as they were all trooping in by the French windows again, “you must hurry home and get indoors before the

servants are up. I don't want this frolic to be talked about all over the town."

"A frolic, indeed!" Miss Georgie protested, as her brother was putting her cloak round her shoulders. "I don't call it a frolic at all. I call it very serious business; and I'm looking forward to winning the deepest gratitude of the English public—or at least as much of the English public as you can cram into your garden, my dear."

Then as soon as the light wraps and dust-coats had been distributed and donned, the members of the gay little party said good-bye to Lady Adela in the front hall, and went down the carriage sweep to the gate. Here there was a division; for the Lestranges were going north by Holland Lane to Notting Hill; while Lord Rockminster and his two sisters, making for Palace Gardens Terrace, walked with Lionel Moore only as far as Campden Hill Road: thereafter he pursued his journey to Piccadilly alone.

And even now London was not fully awake, though the sun was touching the topmost branches of the trees, and here and there a high window, struck by the level rays, flashed back a gleam of gold. In this neighbourhood the thoroughfares were quite deserted; silence reigned over those

sleeping houses ; the air was sweet and cool ; now and again a stirring of wind brought a scent of summer-blossom from within the garden-enclosures. It is true that when he got down into Kensington Road he found a long procession of waggons slowly making their way into the vast city ; but this dull, drowsy noise was not ungrateful ; in much content and idly he walked away eastward, looking in from time to time at the beautiful greensward of Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. He was in no hurry. He liked the stillness, the gracious coolness and quietude of the morning, after the hot and feverish nights at the theatre. When at length he reached his lodging in Piccadilly, let himself in with his latchkey, and went upstairs to his rooms, he did not go to bed at once. He drew an easy-chair to the front window, threw himself into it, lit a cigarette, and stared absently across to the branching elms and grassy undulations of the Green Park. Perhaps he was thinking of the pretty, fantastic little comedy that had just been performed up in that garden at Campden Hill—like some dream-picture out of Boccaccio. And if he chanced to recall the fact that the actor who originally played the part of *Damon*, at Drury Lane, some hundred and forty years ago, married

in real life an Earl's daughter, that was but a passing fancy. Of Lord Fareborough's three daughters, it was neither Lady Sybil nor Lady Rosamund, it was the married sister, Lady Adela Cunyngham, who had constituted herself his particular friend.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT GOD PAN.

LATE as he went to bed, sleep did not long detain him, for in his own happy-go-lucky, troubadour sort of life, he was one of the most occupied of men even in this great, hurrying, bustling capital of the world. As soon as he had donned his dressing-gown and come into the sitting-room he swallowed a cup of coffee that was waiting for him, and then, to make sure that unholy hours and cigarettes had not hurt his voice, he dabbed a note on the piano, and began to practice, in the open-throated Italian fashion, those *vocalises* which sound so strangely to the uninstructed ear. He rang for breakfast. He glanced in a despairing way at the pile of letters and parcels awaiting him, the former, no doubt, mostly invitations, the latter, as he could guess, proofs of his latest sittings to the photographers, albums and birth-day books sent for

his autograph, music beseeching commendation, even MS. plays accompanied by pathetic appeals from unknown authors. Then there was a long row of potted scarlet geraniums and large white daisies which the house-porter had ranged by the window; and when he opened the note that had been forwarded with these he found that the wife of a famous statesman had observed as she drove along Piccadilly that the flowers in his balcony wanted renewal and begged his acceptance of this graceful little tribute. He took up a pair of dumb-bells, and had some exercise with them, to keep his arms and chest in good condition. He looked at himself in the mirror; no, he did not seem to have smoked inordinately; nevertheless, he made sundry solemn vows about those insidious cigarettes. Then he began to open the envelopes. Here was an imposing card 'To have the honour of meeting their Royal Highnesses the King and Queen of ——'; here was a more modest bit of pasteboard with '*R.S.V.P.* to Mess President' at the lower corner; here were invitations to breakfasts, to luncheons, to afternoons squawks, to Sunday dinners, to dances and crushes, in short, to every possible kind of diversion and frivolity that the gay world of London could devise. He

went steadily on with his letters. More photographers wanted him to sit to them. Would he accept the dedication of *The Squire's Daughter Fantasia*? The composer of *The Starry Night Valses* would like a lithographic portrait of Mr. Lionel Moore to appear on the cover. A humble admirer of Mr. Lionel Moore's great impersonation of *Harry Thornhill* begged to forward the enclosed acrostic, and might he be allowed to print it in the *Mudborough Young Men's Mutual Improvement Magazine*? Messrs. Smith and Smith would be extremely obliged if Mr. Lionel Moore would honour them with his opinion of the accompanying pair of their patent silver-mounted automatic self-adjusting braces.

"If I don't get a secretary," he muttered to himself, "I shall soon be in a madhouse."

Nor did he pay much attention to his breakfast when it was put on the table, for there were newspapers to be opened and glanced through—country journals, most of them, with marked paragraphs conveying the most unexpected, and even startling, intelligence regarding himself, his occupations, and forthcoming engagements. Then there were the book packets and the rolls of music to be examined; but by this time he had lit an after-

breakfast cigarette, and was proceeding with something of indifference. Occasionally he strolled about the room, or went to the window and looked down into the roaring highway of Piccadilly or across to the sunny foliage and pale blue mists of the Green Park. And then, in the midst of his vague meditations, the following note was brought to him: it had been delivered by hand:—

‘MY DEAR MR. MOORE, I do so *awfully* want to see you, about a matter of *urgent importance*. Do be goodnatured and come and lunch with us—any time before half-past two, if possible. It will be so kind of you. I hope the *morning performance* has done you no harm. Yours sincerely, ADELA CUNYNGHAM.’

Well, luncheon was not much in his way, for on week-days he had to dine at five; nevertheless, Lady Adela was an especial friend of his, and had been kind to him, and here was some serious business. So he hurried through what correspondence was absolutely necessary; he sent word to Green’s Stables that he should not ride that morning; he walked round to a certain gymnasium and had

three-quarters of an hour with the fencing-master (this was an appointment which he invariably held sacred); on his way back to his rooms he called in at Solomon's for a button-hole; and then, having got home and made certain alterations in his toilet, he went out again, jumped into a hansom, and was driven up to the top of Campden-hill, arriving there shortly after one o'clock.

He found Lady Adela and Miss Georgie Le-strange in the drawing-room, or rather just outside, on the little balcony overlooking the garden, and neither of them seemed any the worse for that masquerading in the early dawn: indeed, Miss Georgie's naturally fresh and bright complexion flushed a little more than usual when she saw who this new-comer was, for perhaps she was thinking of the very frank manner in which *Damon* had expressed his admiration for *Pastora* but a few short hours ago.

"I have been telling Georgie all about the dresses at the Drawing-room," said the tall young matron, as she gave him her hand, and regarded him with a friendly look; "but that won't interest you, Mr. Moore. We shall have to talk about the new beauties, rather, to interest *you*."

He was a little puzzled.

"I thought, Lady Adela, you said there was something—something of importance——"

"That depends," said she, with a pleasant smile in her clear grey-blue eyes. "*I* think it of importance; but it remains to be seen whether the world is of the same opinion. Well, I won't keep you in suspense."

She went to the piano, and brought back three volumes plainly bound in green cloth.

"Behold!"

He took them from her, and glanced at the titlepage: '*Kathleen's Sweethearts, a Novel, by Lady Arthur Castletown*' was what he found there.

"So it is out at last," said he, for he had more than once heard of this great work while it was still in progress.

"Yes," said she, eagerly, "though it isn't issued to the public yet. The fact is, Mr. Moore, I want you to help me. You know all about professional people, and the newspapers, and so on—who better?—and of course I'm very anxious about my first book—my first big book, that is—and I don't want it to get just thrown aside, without ever being glanced at. Now what am I to do? You

may speak quite freely before Georgie—she's just as anxious as I am, every bit, I believe—only what to do we can't tell."

"All that I can think of," said the ruddy-haired young damsel, with a laugh, "is to have little advertisements printed, and I will leave them behind me wherever I go—in the stalls of a theatre, or at a concert, or anywhere. You know, Adela, you can *not* expect me to turn myself into a sandwich-man, and go about the streets between boards."

"Georgie, you're frivolous," said Lady Adela, and she again turned to Lionel Moore, who was still holding the three green volumes in his hands, in a helpless sort of fashion. "You know, Mr. Moore, there are such a lot of books published nowadays—crowds!—shoals!—and, unless there is a little attention drawn beforehand, what chance have you? I want a friend in court—I want several friends in court—and that's the truth; now, how am I to get them?"

This was plain speaking; but he was none the less bewildered.

"You see, Lady Adela, the theatre is so different from the world of letters. I've met one or two newspaper-men now and again, but they

were dramatic critics—I never heard that they reviewed books.”

“But they were connected with newspapers?—then they must know the men who do,” said this alert and intelligent lady. “Oh, I don’t ask for anything unfair! I only ask for a chance. I don’t want to be thrown into a corner unread, or sold to the second-hand bookseller uncut. Now, Mr. Moore, think. You must know *lots* of newspaper-men if you would only *think*: why, they’re always coming about theatres. And they would do anything for you, for you are such a popular favourite; and a word from you would be of such value to a beginner like me. Now, Mr. Moore, be good-natured, and consider. But first of all come away and have some lunch: and then we’ll talk it over.”

When they had gone into the dining-room and sate down at table, he said—

“Well, if it comes to that, I certainly know one newspaper-man; in fact, I have known him all my life; he is my oldest friend. But then he is merely the head of the Parliamentary reporting staff of the *Morning Mirror*—he’s in the Gallery of the House of Commons, you know, every night—and I’m afraid he couldn’t do much about a book.”

"Couldn't he do a little, Mr. Moore?" said Lady Adela, insidiously. "Couldn't he get it hinted in the papers that 'Lady Arthur Castletown' is only a *nom de plume*?"

"Then you don't object to your own name being mentioned?" asked this simple young man.

"No, no, not at all," said she, frankly. "People are sure to get to know. There are some sketches of character in the book that I think will make a little stir—I mean people will be asking questions; and then you know how a pseudonym whets curiosity—they will certainly find out—and they will talk all the more then. That ought to do the book some good. And then you understand, Mr. Moore," continued this remarkably *naïve* person, "if your friend happened to know any of the reviewers, and could suggest how some little polite attention might be paid them, there would be nothing wrong in that, would there? I am told that they are quite gentlemen now-a-days—they go everywhere—and—and indeed I should like to make their acquaintance, since I've come into the writing fraternity myself."

Lionel Moore was silent; he was considering how he should approach the fastidious, whimsical,

sardonic Maurice Mangan on this extremely difficult subject.

"Let me see," he said, presently. "This is Wednesday; my friend Mangan won't be at the House; I will send a message to his rooms, and ask him to come down to the theatre: then we can have a consultation about it. May I take this copy of the book with me, Lady Adela?"

"Certainly, certainly!" said she, with promptitude. "And if you know of any one to whom I should send a copy, with the author's name in it—my own name, I mean—it would be extremely kind of you to let me know. It's so awfully hard for us poor outsiders to get a hearing. You professional folk are in a very different position—the public just worship you—you have it all your own way—you don't need to care what the critics say—but look at *me*! I may knock and knock at the door of the Temple of Fame until my knuckles are sore, and who will take any notice—unless, perhaps, some friendly ear begins to listen? Do you think Mr. Mangan—did you say Mangan?—do you think he would come and dine with us some evening?"

The artless ingenuousness of her speech was almost embarrassing. ,

“He is a very busy man,” he said, doubtfully, “very busy. He has his Gallery work to do, of course; and then I believe he is engaged on some important philosophical treatise—he has been at it for years, indeed——”

“Oh, he writes books too?” Lady Adela cried. “Then certainly you must bring him to dinner. Shall I write a note now, Mr. Moore—a Sunday evening, of course, so that we may secure you as well——”

“I think I would wait a little, Lady Adela,” he said, “until I see how the land lies. He’s a most curious fellow, Mangan: difficult to please, and capricious. I fancy he is rather disappointed with himself; he ought to have done something great, for he knows everything—at least he knows what is fine in everything, in painting, in poetry, in music; and yet with all his sympathy he seems to be for ever grumbling—and mostly at himself. He is a difficult fellow to deal with——”

“I suppose he eats his dinner like anybody else,” said Lady Adela, somewhat sharply: she was not used to having her invitations scorned.

“Yes, but I think he would prefer to eat it in a village ale-house,” Lionel said, with a smile, “where he could make ‘the violet of a legend

blow, among the chops and steaks.' However, I will take him your book, Lady Adela; and I have no doubt he will be able to give you some good advice."

It was late that evening when, in obedience to the summons of a sixpenny telegram, Maurice Mangan called at the stage-door of the New Theatre, and was passed in. Lionel Moore was on the stage—as anyone could tell, for the resonant baritone voice was ringing clear above the multitudinous music of the orchestra; but Mangan, not wishing to be in the way, did not linger in the wings, he made straight for his friend's room, which he knew. And in the dusk of the long corridor he was fortunate enough to behold a beautiful apparition in the person of a young French officer in the gayest of uniforms, who, apparently to maintain the character he bore in the piece (it was that of a young prisoner of war liberated on parole, who played sad havoc with the hearts of the village maidens by reason of his fascinating ways and pretty broken English), had just facetiously chucked two of the women dressers under the chin; and these damsels were simpering at this mark of condescension, and evidently much impressed by the swagger and braggadocio of the

miniature warrior. However, Mlle. Girond (the boy-officer in question) no sooner caught sight of the newcomer than she instantly and demurely altered her demeanour; and as she passed him in the corridor she favoured him with a grave and courteous little bow, for she had met him more than once in Miss Burgoyne's sitting-room. Mangan returned that salutation most respectfully; and then he went on and entered the apartment in which Lionel Moore dressed.

It was empty; so this tall, thin man with the slightly stooping shoulders threw himself into a wicker-work easy-chair, and let his eyes—which were much keener than was properly compatible with the half-affected expression of indolence that had become habitual to him—roam over the heterogeneous collection of articles around. These were abundantly familiar to him—the long dressing-table with all its appliances for making up, the mirrors, the wigs on blocks, the gay-coloured garments, the fencing-foils and swords, the framed series of portraits from *Vanity Fair*, the innumerable photographs stuck everywhere about. Indeed it was something not immediately connected with these paraphernalia of an actor's existence that seemed to be occupying his mind, even as he idly

regarded the various pastes and colours, the powder-puffs and pencils, the pots of vaseline. His eyes grew absent as he sate there. Was he thinking of the Linn Moore of years and years ago who used to reveal to the companion of his boyhood all his high aims and strenuous ambitions—how he was resolved to become a Mendelssohn, a Mozart, a Beethoven? Whither had fled all those wistful dreams and ardent aspirations? What was Linn Moore now?—why, a singer in comic opera; his face beplastered almost out of recognition; a pet of the frivolous-fashionable side of London society; the chief adornment of photographers' windows.

“ ‘Half a beast is the great god Pan,’ ” this tall, languid-looking man murmured to himself, as he was vacuously staring at those paints and brushes and cosmetics; and then he got up and began to walk indeterminately about the room, his hands behind his back.

Presently the door was opened, and in came Lionel Moore, followed by his dresser.

“Hallo, Maurice!—you're late,” said *Harry Thornhill*, as he surrendered himself to his factotum, who forthwith began to strip him of his travelling costume of cocked hat, frogged coat,

white leather breeches, and shining black boots in order to make way for the more brilliant attire of the last act.

“Now that I am here, what are your highness’s commands?” Mangan asked.

“There’s a book there—written by a friend of mine,” Lionel said, as he was helping his dresser to get off the glittering topboots. “She wants me to do what I can for her with the press. What do I know about that? Still, she is a very particular friend—and you must advise me.”

Mangan rose and went to the mantel-piece and took down Volume I.

“Lady Arthur Castletown—” said he.

“But that is not her real name,” the other interposed. “Her real name is Lady Adela Cunyngham—of course you know who she is.”

“I have been permitted to hear the echo of her name from those rare altitudes in which you dwell now,” the other said lazily. “So she is one of your fashionable acquaintances; and she wants to secure the puff preliminary, and a number of favourable reviews, I suppose; and then you send for me. But what can I do for you except ask one or two of the Gallery men to mention the book in their London Correspondent’s letter?”

“But that’s the very thing, my dear fellow!” Lionel Moore cried, as he was getting on his white silk stockings. “The very thing! She wants attention drawn to the book. She doesn’t want to be passed over. She wants to have the name of the book, and the name of the author, brought before the public——”

“Her real name?”

“Yes, certainly, if that is advisable.”

“Oh well, there’s not much trouble about that. You can always minister to a mind diseased by a morbid craving for notoriety if a paragraph in a country newspaper will suffice. So this is part of what your fashionable friends expect from you, Linn, in return for their patronage?”

“It’s nothing of the kind: she would do as much for me, if she knew how, or if there was any occasion.”

“Oh, well, it is no great thing,” said Mangan, who was really a very good-natured sort of person, despite his supercilious talk. “In fact, you might do her ladyship a more substantial service than that.”

“How?”

“I thought you knew Quirk—Octavius Quirk?”

“But you have always spoken so disparagingly of him!” the other exclaimed.

“What has that to do with it?” he asked; and then he continued in his indolent fashion: “Why, I thought you knew all about Quirk. Quirk belongs to a band of literary weaklings, not any one of whom can do anything worth speaking of; but they try their best to write up each other; and sometimes they take it into their head to help an acquaintance—and then their cry is like that of a pack of beagles; you would think the Press of London, or a considerable section of it, had but one voice. Why don’t you take Lady Arthur’s—Lady Constance’s—what’s her name?—why don’t you take her book to the noble association of log-rollers? I presume the novel is trash; they’ll welcome it all the more. She is a woman—she is not to be feared; she hasn’t as yet committed the crime of being successful—she isn’t to be envied and anonymously attacked. That’s the ticket for you, Linn. They mayn’t convince the public that Lady What’s-her-name is a wonderful person; but they will convince her that she is; and what more does she want?”

“I don’t understand you, Maurice!” the young baritone cried, almost angrily. “Again and again you’ve spoken of Octavius Quirk as if he were beneath contempt.”

“What has that to do with it?” the other repeated placidly. “As an independent writer, Quirk is quite beneath contempt—quite. There is no backbone in his writing at all; and he knows his own weakness; and he thinks he can conceal it by the use of furious adjectives. He is always in a frantic rush and flurry, that produces no impression on anybody. A whirlwind of feathers, that’s about it. He goes out into the highway and brandishes a double-handed sword—in order to sweep off the head of a buttercup. And I suppose he expects the public to believe that his wild language, all about nothing, means strength; just as he hopes that they will take his noisy horse-laugh for humour. That’s Octavius Quirk as a writer—a nobody, a nothing, a wisp of straw in convulsions; but as a puffer—ah, there you have him!—as a puffer, magnificent, glorious, a Greek hero, invincible, invulnerable. My good man, it’s Octavius Quirk you should go to! Get him to call on his pack of beagles to give tongue; and then, my goodness, you’ll hear a cry—for a while at least. Is there anything at all in the book?”

“I don’t know,” said *Harry Thornhill*, who had changed quickly, and was now regaling himself with a little of Miss Burgoyne’s lemonade, with

which the prima donna was so kind as to keep him supplied. "Well, now, I shall be on the stage some time : what do you say to looking over Lady Adela's novel ? "

"All right."

There was a tapping at the door : it was the call-boy.

But Lionel Moore did not immediately answer the summons.

"Look here, Maurice ; if you should find anything in the book—anything you could say a word in favour of—I wish you'd come round to the Garden Club with me, after the performance, and have a bit of supper. Octavius Quirk is almost sure to be there."

"What, Quirk ? I thought the Garden was given over to Dukes and comic actors ? "

"There's a sprinkling of everybody in it," the young baritone said ; "and Quirk likes it because it is an all-night club—he never seems to go to bed at all. Will you do that ? "

"Oh, yes," Maurice Mangan said ; and forthwith, as his friend left the dressing-room, he plunged into Lady Adela's novel.

The last act of *The Squire's Daughter* is longer than its predecessors ; so that Mangan had plenty

of time to acquire some general knowledge of the character and contents of these three volumes. Indeed, he had more than time for all the brief scrutiny he deemed necessary ; when Lionel Moore reappeared, to get finally quit of his theatrical trappings for the night, his friend was standing at the fireplace, looking at a sketch in brown chalk of Miss Burgoyne, which that amiable young lady had herself presented to *Harry Thornhill*.

“ Well, what’s the verdict ? ”

Mangan turned round, rather bewildered ; and then he recollected that he had been glancing at the novel.

“ Oh, *that* ? ” he said, regarding the three volumes with no very favourable air. “ Mighty poor stuff, I should say : just about as weak as they make it. But harmless. Some of the conversation—between the women—is natural : trivial, but natural. The plain truth is, my dear Linn, it is a very foolish, stupid book, which should never have been printed at all ; but I suppose your fashionable friend could afford to pay for having it printed.”

“ But, look here, Maurice,” Lionel said, in considerable surprise, “ I don’t see how it can be so very stupid, when Lady Adela herself is one

of the brightest, cleverest, shrewdest, most intelligent women you could meet with anywhere—quite unusually so.”

“That may be; but she is not the first clever woman who has made the mistake of imagining that because she is socially popular she must therefore be able to write a book.”

“And what am I to say to Octavius Quirk?”

“What are you to say to the log-rollers? Don’t say anything. Get Lady Adela to ask one or two of them to dinner. You’ll fetch Quirk that way easily: they say Gargantua was a fool compared to him.”

“I’ve seen him do pretty well at the Garden, especially about two in the morning,” was the young baritone’s comment; and then, as he began to get into his ordinary attire, he said—“To tell you the truth, Maurice, Lady Adela rather hinted that she would be pleased to make the acquaintance of any—of any literary man——”

“Who could do her book a good turn?”

“No, you needn’t put it as rudely as that. She rather feels that in becoming an authoress she has allied herself with literary people—and would naturally like to make acquaintances; so, if it came to that, I should consider myself empowered

to ask Quirk whether he would accept an invitation to dinner—I mean, at Aivron Lodge. It's no use asking you, Maurice?" he added, with a little hesitation.

Maurice Mangan laughed.

"No, no, Linn, my boy; thank you all the same. I say," he continued, as he took up his hat and stick, seeing that Lionel was about ready to go, "do you ever hear from Miss Francie Wright, or have you forgotten her among all your fine friends?"

"Oh, I hear from Francie sometimes," he answered, carelessly, "or about her, anyway, whenever I get a letter from home. She's very well. Boarding out pauper sick children is her new fad; and I believe she's very busy, and very happy over it. Come along, Maurice: we'll walk up to the Garden, and get something of an appetite for supper."

When they arrived at the Garden Club (so named from its proximity to Covent Garden) they went forthwith into the spacious apartment on the ground-floor which served at once as dining-room, newspaper-room, and smoking-room. There was hardly anybody in it. Four young men in evening-dress were playing cards at a side-table; at another table a solitary member was writing; but at the

long supper-table—which was prettily lit up with crimson-shaded lamps, and the appointments of which seemed very trim and clean and neat—all the chairs were empty, and the only other occupants of the place were the servants, who wore a simple livery of white linen.

“What for supper, Maurice?” the younger of the two friends asked.

“Anything—with salad,” Mangan answered : he was examining a series of old engravings that hung round the walls.

“On a warm night like this what do you say to cold lamb, salad, and some hock and iced soda-water?”

“All right.”

Supper was speedily forthcoming, and as they took their places, Mangan said—

“You don’t often go down to see the old people, Linn?”

“I’m so frightfully busy!”

“Has Miss Francie ever been up to the theatre—to see *The Squire’s Daughter*, I mean?”—this question he seemed to put rather diffidently.

“No. I’ve asked her often enough; but she always laughs and puts it off. She seems to be as busy down there as I am up here.”

“What does she think of the great name and fame you have made for yourself?”

“How should I know?”

Then there was silence for a second or two.

“I wish you’d run down to see them some Sunday, Linn: I’d go down with you.”

“Why not go down by yourself?—they’d be tremendously glad to see you.”

“I should be more welcome if I took you with me. You know your cousin likes you to pay a little attention to the old people. Come! Say Sunday week.”

“My dear fellow, Sunday is my busiest day! Sunday night is the only night I have out of the seven. And I fancy that it is for that very Sunday evening that Lord Rockminster has engaged the Lansdowne Gallery: he gives a little dinner-party, and his sisters have a big concert afterwards—we’ve all got to sing the chorus of the new marching-song that Lady Sybil has composed for the army.”

“Who is Lady Sybil?”

“The sister of the authoress whose novel you were reading.”

“My gracious, is there another genius in the family!”

“There’s a third,” said Lionel, with a bit of a smile. “What would you say if Lady Rosamund Bourne were to paint a portrait of me as *Harry Thornhill* for the Royal Academy?”

“I should say the betting was fifty to one against its getting in.”

“Ah, you’re unjust, Maurice: you don’t know them. I dare say you judged that novel by some high literary standard that it doesn’t pretend to reach. I am sure of this, that if it’s half as clever as Lady Adela Cunyngham herself, it will do very well.”

“It will do very well for the kind of people who will read it,” said the other, indifferently.

This was a free-and-easy place: when they had finished supper, Lionel Moore lit a cigarette, and his friend a briar-root pipe, without moving from the table; and Mangan’s prayer was still that his companion should fix Sunday week for a visit to the little Surrey village where they had been boys together, and where Lionel’s father and mother (to say nothing of a certain Miss Francie Wright, whose name cropped up more than once in Mangan’s talk) were still living. But during this entreaty Lionel’s attention happened to be attracted to the glass-door communicating with

the hall; and instantly he said in an undertone—

“Here’s a stroke of luck, Maurice: Quirk has just come in. How am I to sound him? What should I do?”

“Haven’t I told you?” said Mangan curtly. “Get your swell friends to feed him.”

Nevertheless this short, fat man who now strode into the room, and nodded briefly to these two acquaintances, speedily showed that on occasion he knew how to feed himself. He called a waiter, and ordered an underdone beefsteak with Spanish onions, toasted cheese to follow, and a large bottle of stout to begin with; then he took the chair at the head of the table, thus placing himself next to Lionel Moore.

“A very empty den to-night,” observed this new comer, whose heavy face, watery blue eyes, lank hair plentifully streaked with grey, and unwholesome complexion would not have produced a too favourable impression on any one unacquainted with his literary gifts and graces.

Lionel agreed; and then followed a desultory conversation about nothing in particular, though Mr. Octavius Quirk was doing his best to say clever things and show off his boisterous humour.

Indeed, it was not until that gentleman's very substantial supper was being brought in that Lionel got an opportunity of artfully asking him whether he had heard anything of Lady Adela Cunyngham's forthcoming novel. He was about to proceed to explain that 'Lady Arthur Castletown' was only a pseudonym when he was interrupted by Octavius Quirk bursting into a roar—a somewhat affected roar—of scornful laughter.

“ Well, of all the phenomena of the day, that is the most ludicrous,” he cried, “—the so-called aristocracy thinking that they can produce anything in the shape of art or literature. The aristocracy—the most exhausted of all our exhausted social strata—what can be expected from *it*? Why, we haven't anywhere now-a-days either art or literature or drama that is worthy of the name—not anywhere—it is all a ghastly, spurious make-believe—a mechanical manufactory of paintings and books and plays without a spark of life in them— ”

Lionel Moore resentfully thought to himself that if Mr. Quirk had been able to do anything in any one of these directions he might have held less despairing views; but of course he did not interrupt this feebly tempestuous monologue.

“—We are all played out, that is the fact—the soil is exhausted—we want a great national upheaval—new condition of things—a social revolution, in short. And we’re going to get it,” he continued, in a sort of triumphant way; “there’s no mistake about that: the social revolution is in the air, it is under our feet, it is pressing in upon us from every side; and yet at the very moment that the aristocracy have got notice to quit from their deer-forests, and their salmon-rivers, and grouse-moors, they so far mistake the signs of the times that they think they should be devoting themselves to art and going on the stage! Was there ever such incomprehensible madness!”

“I hope they won’t sweep away deer-forests and grouse-moors just all at once,” the young baritone said, modestly, “for I am asked to go to the Highlands at the beginning of next August—”

“Make haste, then, and see the last of these doomed institutions!” observed Mr. Quirk, with dark significance, as he looked up from his steak and onions. “I tell you deer-forests are doomed; grouse-moors are doomed; salmon-rivers are doomed. They are a survival of feudal rights

and privileges which the new democracy—the new ruling power—will make short work of. The time has gone by for all these absurd restrictions and reservations! There is no defence for them: there never was: they were conceived in an iniquity of logic which modern common sense will no longer suffer. *Bona vacantia* can't belong to anybody—therefore they belong to the King: that's a pretty piece of reasoning, isn't it? And if the crofter or the labourer says '*Bona vacantia* can't belong to anybody—therefore they belong to me'—isn't the reasoning as good? But it is not merely game-laws that must be abolished, it is game itself—"

"If you abolish the one, you'll soon get rid of the other," Maurice Mangan said, with a kind of half-contemptuous indifference: he was examining this person in a curious way, as he might have looked through the wires of a cage in the Zoological Gardens.

"Both must be abolished," Mr. Octavius Quirk continued, with windy vehemence. "The very distinction that takes any animal *feræ naturæ* and constitutes it game is a relic of class-privilege and must go—"

"Then Irish landlords will no longer be con-

sidered *feræ naturæ*?" Mangan asked, incidentally.

"We must be free from these feudal tyrannies, these mediæval chains and manacles that the Norman kings imposed on a conquered people. We must be as free as the United States of America—"

"America!" Mangan said; and he was rude enough to laugh. "The State of New York has more stringent game-laws than any European country that I know of; and why not? They wanted to preserve certain wild animals, for the general good; and they took the only possible way."

Quirk was disconcerted only for a moment; presently he had resumed, in his reckless, *mouton-enragé* fashion—

"That may be; but the Democracy of Great Britain has pronounced against game; and game must go; there is no disputing the fact. Hunting in any civilised community is a relic of barbarism; it is worse in this country—it is an infringement of the natural rights of the tiller of the soil. What is the use of talking about it!—the whole thing is doomed: if you're going to Scotland this autumn, Mr. Moore, if you are to be shown all those

exclusive pastimes of the rich and privileged classes, well, I'd advise you to keep your eyes open, and write as clear an account of what you see as you can; and, by Jove, twenty years hence your book will be read with amazement by the new generation!"

Here the pot of foaming stout claimed his attention; he buried his head in it; and thereafter, sitting back in his chair, sighed forth his satisfaction. The time was come for a large cigar.

And how, in the face of this fierce denunciation of the wealthy classes and all their ways, could Lionel Moore put in a word for Lady Adela's poor little literary infant? It would be shrivelled into nothing by a blast of this simulated simoom. It would be trodden underfoot by the log-roller's elephantine jocosity. In a sort of despair he turned to Maurice Mangan, and would have entered into conversation with him but that Mangan now rose and said he must be going, nor could he be prevailed on to stay. Lionel accompanied him into the hall.

"That Jabberwock makes me sick; he's such an ugly devil," Mangan said, as he put on his hat; and surely that was strange language coming

from a grave philosopher who was about to publish a volume on the Fundamental Fallacies of M. Comte.

“But what am I to do, Maurice?” Lionel said, as his friend was leaving. “It’s no use asking for his intervention at present; he’s simply running amuck.”

“If your friend—Lady What’s-her-name—is as clever as you say, she’ll just twist that fellow round her finger,” the other observed, briefly. “Good-night, Linn!”

And indeed it was not of Octavius Quirk, nor yet of Lady Adela’s novel, that Maurice Mangan was thinking as he carelessly walked away through the dark London thoroughfares, towards his rooms in Victoria Street. He was thinking of that quiet little Surrey village; and of two boys there who had a great belief in each other—and in themselves, too, for the matter of that; and of all the beautiful and wonderful dreams they dreamt while as yet the far-reaching future was veiled from them. And then he thought of Linn Moore’s dressing-room at the theatre; and of the paints and powder and vulgar tinsel that had to fit him out for exhibition before the footlights; and of the feverish whirl of life and the bedazzlement of

popularity and fashionable petting; and somehow or other the closing lines of Mrs. Browning's poem would come ever and anon into his head as a sort of unceasing refrain—

*‘The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,—
For the reed that grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds in the river.’*

CHAPTER III.

NINA.

ONE morning Lionel was just about to go out (he had already been round to the gymnasium and got his fencing over) when the house-porter came up and said that a young lady wished to see him.

“What does she want?” he said, impatiently—for something had gone wrong with the clasp of his cigarette-case, and he could not get it right. “What’s her name? Who is she?”

“She gave me her name, sir; but I did not quite catch it,” said the factotum of the house.

“Oh, well, send her up,” said he: no doubt this was some trembling *débutante*, accompanied by an ancient *duenna* and a roll of music. And then he went to the window, to try to get the impenitent clasp to shut.

But perhaps he would not have been so wholly engrossed with that trifling difficulty had he known

who this was who had come softly up the stair and was now standing irresolute, smiling, wondering at the open door. She was a remarkably pretty, even handsome young lady, whose pale clear olive complexion and coal-black hair bespoke her Southern birth; while there was an eager and yet timid look in her lustrous soft black eyes, and something about the mobile, half-parted mouth that seemed to say she hardly knew whether to cry or laugh over this meeting with an old friend. A very charming picture she presented there; for besides her attractive personal appearance, she was very neatly, not to say coquettishly, dressed; her costume, which had a distinctly foreign air, being all of black, save for the smart little French-looking hat of deep crimson straw and velvet.

At last she said—

“Leo!”

He turned instantly, and had nearly dropped the cigarette-case in his amazement. And for a second he seemed paralysed of speech—he was wholly bewildered—perhaps overcome by some swift sense of responsibility at finding Antonia Rossi in London, and alone.

“Che, Nina mia,” he cried, “tu stai cca a Londra!—chesta mo, chi su credeva!—e senza

manca scriverme nu viers' e lettere—Nina!—mi pare nu suonno!——”

She interrupted him; she came forward smiling—and the parting of the pretty lips showed a sunny gleam of teeth; she held up her two hands, palm outwards, as if she would shut away from herself that old familiar Neapolitanese.

“No, no, no, Leo,” she said, rapidly, “I speak English now—I study, study, study, morning, day, night; and always I say, ‘When I see Leo, he will have much surprise that I speak English’—always I say, ‘Some day I go to England, and when I see Leo’——”

The happy eager smile suddenly died away from her face. She looked at him. A strange kind of trouble—of doubt and wonderment and pain—came into those soft, dark, expressive eyes.

“You—you not wish to see me, Leo?” she said, rather breathlessly—and as if she could hardly believe this thing. “I come to London—and you not glad to see me——”

Quick tears of wounded pride sprang to the long black lashes; but with a dignified, even haughty inclination of the head she turned from him and put her hand on the handle of the door. At the same instant he caught her arm.

“Why, Nina, you’re just the spoiled child you always were! Ah, your English doesn’t go so far as that: you don’t know what a spoiled child is?—*è la cianciosella*, you Neapolitan girl! Why, of course I’m glad to see you—I am delighted to see you—but you frightened me, Nina—your coming like this, alone——”

“I frighten you, Leo?” she said, and a quick laugh shone brightly through her tears. “Ah, I see—it is that I have no chaperon? But I had no time—I wished to see you, Leo—I said, ‘Leo will understand, and afterwards I get a chaperon all correctly.’ Oh, yes, yes, I know—but where is the time?—yesterday I go through the streets—it is Leo, Leo everywhere in the windows—I see you in this costume, in the other costume—and your name so large, so very large, in the—in the——”

“The theatre-bills? Well, sit down, Nina, and tell me how you come to be in London.”

She had by this time quite forgiven or forgotten his first dismay on finding her there; and now she took a chair with much quiet complaisance, and sate down, and put her black silk sunshade across her knees.

“It is simple,” she said, and from time to time she regarded him in a very frank and pleased and

even affectionate way, as if the old comradeship of the time when they were both studying in Naples was not to be interfered with by the natural timidity of a young and extremely pretty woman coming as a stranger into a strange town. "You remember Carmela, Leo? Carmela and her—her spouse—they have great good fortune—they get a grand prize in the lottery—then he says 'Carmeluccia, we will go to Paris—we will go to Paris, Carmeluccia—and why not Nina also? Very kind, was it not?—but Andrea is always kind, so also Carmela, to me. Then I am in Paris. I say, 'It is not far to London; I go to London; I go to London, and see Leo.' Perhaps I get an engagement—oh, no, no, no, you shall not laugh!" she broke in—though it was she herself who was laughing, and not he at all. "I am improved—oh, yes, a little—a little improved—you remember old Pandiani he always say my voice not bad, but that *agilità* was for me very difficult."

He remembered very well; but he also remembered that when he left Naples Signorina Rossi was labouring away with the most pertinacious assiduity at cavatinas full of runs and scales and fiorituri generally; and he was quite willing to believe that such diligence had met with its due

reward. But when the young lady modestly hinted that she had left her music in the hall below, and would like Leo to hear whether she had not acquired a good deal more of flexibility than her voice used to possess, and when he had fetched the music and taken it to the piano for her, he was not a little surprised to see her select Ambroise Thomas' '*Io son Titania*.' And he was still more astonished when he found her singing this difficult piece of music with a brilliancy, an ease, a *verve* of execution that he had never dreamed of her being able to reach.

"Brava! Brava! Bravissima!—Well, you *have* improved, Nina!" he exclaimed. "And it isn't only in freedom of production, it is in quality, too, in *timbre*—my goodness, your voice has ever so much more volume and power! Come, now, try some big, dramatic thing——"

She shook her head.

"No, no, Leo, I know what I do," she said. "I shall never have the grand style—never—but you think I am improved, yes? Well, now, I sing something else."

He forgot all about her lack of a chaperon: they were fellow-students again, as in the old days at Naples, when they worked hard (and also played

a little) when they comforted each other, and strove to bear with equanimity the grumbling and querulousness of that always dissatisfied old Pandiani. Signorina Rossi now sang the Shadow Song from "Dinorah;" then she sang the Jewel Song from "Faust;" she sang *Caro nome* from "Rigoletto," or anything else that he could suggest; and her runs and shakes and scale passages were delivered with a freedom and precision that again and again called forth his applause.

"And you have never sung in public, Nina?" he asked.

"At one concert, yes, in Naples," the young lady made answer. "And at two or three *matinées*." And then she turned to him with a bright look. "You know this, Leo?—I am offered—no—I was offered—an engagement to sing in opera; oh, yes; it was the *Impresario* from Malta—he comes to Naples—Pandiani makes us all sing to him—then will I go to Malta, to the opera there? No!"

"Why not, Nina? Surely that was a good opening?" he said.

She turned away from him again, and her fingers wandered lightly over the keys of the piano.

“I always say to me, ‘Some day I am in England; the English give much money at concerts; perhaps that is better.’”

“So you’ve come over to England to get a series of concert-room engagements: is that it, Nina?”

She shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly.

“Perhaps. One must wait and see. It is not my ambition. No. The light opera, that is—popular?—is it right?”

“Yes, yes.”

“It is very popular in England,” said the young Italian lady, with her eyes coming back from the music-sheets to seek those of her friend. “Well, Leo, if I take a small part to begin, have I voice sufficient? What do you think? No; be frank: say to yourself ‘I am Pandiani; here is Antonia Rossi troubling me once more; it is useless; go away, Antonia Rossi, and not trouble me!’ Well, Maestro Pandiani, what you say?”

“So you want to go on the stage, Nina?” said he; and again the dread of finding himself responsible for this solitary young stranger sent a qualm to his heart. It was an embarrassing position altogether; but at the same time the thought of shaking her off—of getting free from this responsibility by telling a white lie or two and

persuading her to go back to Naples—that thought never even occurred to him. To shake off his old comrade Nina? He certainly would have preferred, for many reasons, that she should have taken to concert-room business; but if she was relying on him for an introduction to the lyric stage, why he was bound to help her in every possible way. “You know you’ve got an excellent voice!” he continued. “And a very little stage training would fit you for a small part in comedy-opera, if that is what you’re thinking of, as a beginning. But I don’t know that you would like it, Nina. You see, you would have to become under-study for the lady who has the part at present; and they’d probably want you to sing in the chorus; and you’d get a very small salary—at first, you know, until you were qualified to take one of the more important parts—and then you might get into a travelling-company—”

“A small part?” said she, with much cheerfulness. “Oh, yes; why not? I must learn.”

“But I don’t know that you would like it,” he said, still ruefully. “You see, Nina, you might have to dress in the same room with two or three of the chorus-girls—”

“And then?” she said, with a little dramatic

gesture, and an elevation of her beautifully-formed black eyebrows. "Leo, you never saw my lodgings with the family Debernardi—you have only mount the stairs—"

"My goodness, Nina, I could guess what the inside of the rooms was like, if they were anything like those interminable and horrid stairs!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "And you who were always so fond of pretty things, and flowers, and always so particular when we went to a restaurant—to live with the Debernardis!"

"Ah, Leo, you imagine not why?" she said, also laughing, and when she laughed, her milk-white teeth shone merrily. "Old Pietro Debernardi he lives in England some years; he speaks English, perhaps not very well, but he speaks; then he teach me as he knows; and when it is possible I go on the *Risposta* and sail over to Capri, and all the way, and all the return, I listen, and listen, and listen to the English people; and I remember, and I practise alone in my own room, and I say 'Leo, he must not ridicule me, when I go to England.'"

"Ridicule you!" said he, indignantly. "I wish I could speak Italian as freely as you speak English, Nina!"

“Oh, you speak Italian ver’ well!” said she. “But why you speak still the Neapolitan dialetto—dialect, is it right?—that you hear in the shops and the streets? Ah, I remember you are so proud of it, and when I try to teach you proper Italian, you laugh—you wish to speak like Sabetta Debernardi, and Giacomo, and the others. That is the fault to learn by ear, instead of the books correctly. And you have not forgotten yet!”

“Well, Nina,” he resumed, “I don’t seem to have frightened you with the possibility of your having to dress in the same room with two or three chorus-girls whom you don’t know; and in fact, if I happened to be acquainted with the theatre, I dare say I could get the manager to make sure you were to dress along with some nice girl, who would show you how to make up, and all that. But you would get a very small salary to begin with, Nina; perhaps only thirty shillings a week—and an extra pound a week when you had to take up your under-study duties—however, that need not trouble you, because we are old comrades, Nina, and while you are in England my purse is yours—”

She looked at him doubtfully.

“Ah, you don’t understand,” he said, gently.

“ It’s only this, Nina : I have plenty of money ; if you are a good comrade and a good friend, you will take from me what you want—always—at any moment—— ”

The pretty, pale olive face flushed quickly, and for a brief second she glanced at him with grateful eyes ; but it was perhaps to cover her embarrassment that she now rose from the piano, and pretended to be tired of the music and of these professional schemes.

“ It is enough of business,” she said, lightly ; “ come, Leo, will you go for a small walk ?—have you time ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I have time,” said he, “ but you must not say *booziness*, Nina ; it is *bizness*.”

“ *Beezness!*—*beezness!*” she said, smiling. “ It is enough of *beezness*. You go for a walk with me—yes ? How beautiful the weather ! ” she continued, in a suddenly altered tone as she looked out at the sunlit foliage of the Green Park ; and then she murmured, almost to herself, in those soft Italian vowel-sounds—

“ Ah, Leo mio, che sarei felice d’essere in campagna ! ”

It was a kind of sigh ; perhaps that was the reason she had inadvertently relapsed into her

own tongue. And as they went down the stairs, and he opened the door for her, the few words he addressed to her were also in Italian.

“The country!” he said, “We will just step across the street, Nina, and you will find yourself in what is quite as pretty as the country at this time of year. You may fancy yourself sitting in the Villa Reale, if you could only have a flash of blue sea underneath the branches of the trees.”

But when they had crossed over and got into the comparative quiet of the Park, she resolutely returned to her English again; and now she was telling him about the people in Naples whom he used to know and of their various fortunes and circumstances. Sometimes neither of them spoke; for all this around them was very still and pleasant—the fresh foliage of the trees and the long lush grass of the enclosures as yet undimmed by the summer dust; the cool shadows thrown by the elms and limes just moving as the wind stirred the wide branches; altogether a world of soft, clear, sunny green unbroken except by here and there a small copper beech with its bronze leaves become translucent in the hot light. It is true that the browsing sheep were abnormally black;

and the yellow-billed starlings had perhaps less sheen on their feathers than they would have had in the country; nevertheless, for a park in the midst of a great city, this place was very quiet, and beautiful, and sylvan; and indeed, when these two sate down on a couple of chairs under a fragrant hawthorn, Nina's lustrous dark eyes became wistful and absent and she said—

“Yes, Leo, it is as you say in the house—it all appears a dream.”

“What appears like a dream to you?” her companion asked.

“To be in London, sitting with you, Leo, and hearing you speak,” she answered in a low voice. “Often I think of it—often I think of London—wondering what it is like—and I ask myself ‘Will Leo be the same after his great renown? Are we friends as before?’ and now I am here, and London is not dark and terrible with smoke, but we sit in gardens—oh, very beautiful!—and Leo is talking just as in the old way—perhaps it is a dream?” she continued, looking up with a smile. “Perhaps I wake soon?”

“Oh, no, it isn't a dream, Nina,” said he, “only it might pass for one, for you haven't told me how you managed to get here. It is all a

mystery to me. Where are you staying, for example ? ”

“ My lodging ? ” she said. “ I have an apartment in the Restaurant Gianuzzi. ”

“ Where is that ? ”

“ Rupert Street, ” she answered, with a valiant effort at the proper pronunciation.

“ My goodness, what are you doing, Nina ? ” he said, almost angrily. “ Living by yourself, in a foreign restaurant, in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square ! You ’ll have to come out of that at once ! ”

“ You must not scold me, Leo, ” she said, in rather a hurt way. “ How am I to know ? ”

“ I am not scolding you, ” he said (indeed, he knew better than to do that : if once the notion had got into her little head that he was really upbraiding her, she would have been up and off in a moment, proud-lipped, indignant-eyed, with a fierce wrong rankling in her heart ; and weeks it might take him to pet her into gentleness again, even if she did not forthwith set out for the South, resolved to return to this harsh, cold England no more). “ I am not scolding you, Nina, ” he said, quite gently. “ Of course you didn ’t know. And of course you were attracted by the Italian name—you thought you would feel at home— ”

“They are very nice people, yes, yes!” she said—and still she was inclined to hold her head erect, and her mouth was a little proud and offended.

“Very likely indeed,” he said, with great consideration, “but, you see, Nina, a single young lady can’t stay at a restaurant by herself, without knowing some one, some one to go about with her—”

“Why,” she said, vehemently, almost scornfully, “you think I not know that! An Italian girl—and not know that! Last night, hour after hour, I sit and think ‘Oh there is Leo singing now—if I may go to the theatre!—to sit and hear him—and think of the old days—and perhaps to write home to the Maestro, and tell him of the grand fame of his scholar.’ But no. I cannot go out. There is no time yet to see about a chaperon. When it comes eleven hour, I say ‘The theatre is ceased’; and I go to bed. Then this morning I know no person; I say ‘Very well, I go and see Leo; he will understand; it is how I meet him in the Chiaja, and he says ‘Good-morning, Nina; shall we go for a little walk out to Pozzuoli’—it is just the same.”

“Yes, I understand well enough, Nina,” said he,

goodnaturedly, "and I wasn't scolding you when I said you must get some better place to stay at while you are in London. Well, now, I am going to tell you something. I don't know much about what actors and actresses are in Italy ; but here in England they are exceedingly generous to any of their number that have fallen into misfortune ; and a case of the kind happened a little while ago. An actor, who used to be well-known, died quite suddenly, and left his widow entirely unprovided for ; whereupon there was a subscription got up for her, and a morning performance, too, in which nearly all the leading actors and actresses managed to do something or other ; and the result is that they have been able to take the lease of a house in Sloane Street, and furnish the rooms for her, and she is to earn her living by keeping lodgers. Now, if you really want to remain in London, Nina, don't you think that might be a comfortable home for you ? She is a very nice ladylike little woman ; and she's a great friend of mine, too ; she would do everything she could for you. There's a chaperon for you ready-made !—for I'm afraid she has only one lodger to look after as yet, though she has all the necessary servants, and the establishment is quite complete. What do you say to that, Nina ? "

Her face had brightened up wonderfully at this proposal.

“Yes, yes, yes, Leo!” she said, instantly. “Tell me how I go, and I go at once, to ask her if she can give me apartments.”

He glanced at his watch.

“The fact is,” said he, slowly, “I was to have lunched with a very small party to-day—at a Duchess’s house—at a Duchess’s house, think of that, Nina!”

She jumped to her feet at once, and frankly held out her hand.

“Forgive me, Leo!—I retard you—I did not know.”

“Don’t be in such a hurry, Nina,” he said, as he also rose. “I’m going to break the appointment, that’s all about it; Signorina Antonia Rossi doesn’t arrive in England every day. I’ll tell you what we have got to do: we will get into a hansom and drive to a telegraph-office, and I’ll get rid of that engagement; then we’ll go on to the Restaurant Gianuzzi, and you and I will have a little luncheon by ourselves, just to prepare us for the fatigues of the day; then you will get your things ready, and I will take you down to Mrs. Grey’s in Sloane Street, and introduce you to that most

estimable little lady; and then, if Mrs. Grey happens to be disengaged for the evening, she might be induced to come with you to the New Theatre, and she could take you safe home after the performance. How will that do, Nina?"

"You always were kind to me, Leo," she said—though the gratitude plainly shining in the gentle, dark eyes rendered the words quite unnecessary.

And indeed she was delighted with a sort of childish delight to sit in this swift hansom, bowling along the smooth thoroughfare; and she chatted and chattered in her gay, rapid, disconnected fashion; and she had nothing but contempt for the shabby Neapolitan fiacre and the jolting streets that Leo of course remembered; and when at last she found herself and her companion of old days seated at a small, clean, bright window-table in the Restaurant Gianuzzi—they being the only occupants of the long saloon—she fairly clapped her little hands together in her gladness. And then how pretty she looked! She had removed her bonnet; and the light from the window, falling on the magnificent masses of her jet-black hair, gave it almost a blue sheen in places; while here and there—about the wax-like ear, for example, a ringlet had got astray, and its soft darkness

against the olive complexion seemed to heighten the clear, pure pallor of the oval cheek. And now all doubts as to how Leo might receive her had fled from her mind ; they were on the old familiar terms again ; and she followed with an eager and joyous interest all that he had to say to her. Then how easily could she accentuate her sympathetic listening with this expressive face ! The mobile, somewhat large, beautifully-formed mouth, the piquant little nose with its sensitive nostrils, the eloquent dark eyes could just say anything she pleased ; though, to be sure, however varying her mood might be, in accordance with what she heard and what was demanded of her, her normal expression was one of an almost childish and happy content. She poured her glass of Chianti into a tumbler, and filled that up with water, and sipped it as a canary sips. She made little pellets of bread with her dainty white fingers—but that was in forgetfulness—that was in her eagerness of listening. And at last she said—

“ What is it, Leo ?—you wish to frighten me with your trials ?—no ! for now you laugh at all these—these mortifications. Then a man is proud—he is sensitive—he is not patient as a woman—oh, you think you frighten me ?—no, no ! ”

The fact is, he began to see more and more clearly that she was resolved upon trying her fortune on the lyric stage ; and he thought it his duty to let her know very distinctly what she would have to encounter. He did not exactly try to dissuade her ; but he gave her a general idea of what she might expect, and that in not too roseate colours. His chief difficulty, however, was this : he was possessed by a vague feeling that there might be some awkwardness in having Antonia Rossi engaged at the same theatre with himself ; and yet, looking round all the light operas then being performed, he had honestly to confess that the only part Nina could aspire to take, with her present imperfect pronunciation of English, was that of the young French officer played at the New Theatre by Mlle. Girond. Nor did it lessen his embarrassment to find, as soon as he mentioned this possibility, that to join the New Theatre was precisely what Signorina Rossi desired.

“I don’t think there would be much difficulty about it, Nina,” he was forced to admit—carefully concealing his reluctance the while. “Lehmann, that is our manager, is talking about getting up a second travelling company, for the opera is so popular everywhere ; and there is to be a series of

rehearsals of understudies beginning next Monday, and you could see all the coaching going on. Then you could sit in front at night, and watch Mlle. Girond's 'business:' how would you like that, Nina?—whether what she does is clever or stupid, you would have to copy it; the public would expect that—— ”

“ Why not ? ” Nina said, with a pleasant smile. “ Why not ? I learn. She knows more ; why not I learn ? ”

“ It's a shame to throw away a fine voice like yours on a small part in a comic opera,” he said—still with vague dreams before him of a concert-room career for her.

“ But I must begin,” said she, with much practical common sense, “ and while I am in the small part, I learn to act, I learn the stage-affair, I learn better English, to the end of having a place more important. Why, Leo, you are too careful of me ! At Naples I work hard, I am a slave to old Pandiani—I suffer everything—can I not work hard here in London ? You think I am an infant ? Certainly I am not—no, no—I am old—old—— ”

“ But light-hearted still, Nina,” he said, for she was clearly bent on laughing away his fears. Then

he looked at her with a little hesitation. "There's another thing, Nina : about the costume ?"

"Yes ?" she asked innocently.

"I don't know—whether you would quite like—but I'll show you Mlle. Girond's dress any way—then you can judge for yourself," said he. He called the waiter. He scribbled on a piece of paper 'Photograph of Mdlle. Girond as Capitaine Crépin in *The Squire's Daughter*.' "Send round to some stationer's shop, will you, and get me that ?"

When the messenger returned with the photograph, Lionel, rather timidly, put it before her ; but indeed there was nothing in the costume of Mlle. Girond to startle any one—the uniform of the boy-officer was so obviously a compromise. Nina glanced at it thoughtfully.

"Well, Leo," she said, looking up, "you see no harm ?"

"Harm ?" said he, boldly taking up his cue, "of course not ! It isn't like any uniform that ever was known ; I suppose it's Mlle. Girond's own invention ; but at all events there's nothing to prevent any modest girl wearing it. Why, I know more than one fashionable lady who would think nothing of appearing as Rosalind—and Rosalind's is a real boy's dress, or ought to be—and then

they haven't the excuse that an actor or actress has, that it is a necessity of one's profession. However, there's nothing to be said about that costume anyway: I really had forgotten that Miss Girond had got her pretty little blue coat made with so long a skirt. Besides, Nina, with a voice like yours, you will soon be beyond having to take parts like that."

Indeed she was so evidently anxious to obtain an engagement in the same theatre that he himself was engaged in, that his vague reluctance ultimately vanished; and he began considering when he could bring her before Mr. Lehmann, the manager, and Mr. Carey, the musical conductor, so that they should hear her sing. As to their verdict, as to what the manager would do, he had no doubt whatever. She had a valuable voice; and her ignorance of stage requirements would speedily disappear. At the very time that Lehmann was trying to get new under-studies with a view to the formation of a second travelling-company, why, here was a perfect treasure discovered for him. And Lionel made certain that, as soon as Antonia Rossi had had time to study Mlle. Girond's "business," and perhaps one or two chances of actually playing the part, she would

be drafted into one or other of the travelling-companies, and sent away through the provinces; so that any awkwardness arising from her being in the same theatre with himself, and he her only friend in England, to whom she would naturally appeal in any emergency, would thus be obviated.

"Nina," said he, as they were driving in a hansom to Sloane Street (all her belongings being on the top of the cab), "Lehmann, our manager, is to be at the theatre this afternoon, about some scenery, I fancy; and there's a chance of our catching him if we went down some little time before the performance. Would you come along and sing one or two things?—you might have the arrangement made at once."

"Will you go with me, Leo?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "I mean Mrs. Grey will take you, you know; for I will try to get places for her and you in front afterwards; but I will go with you as well. You won't be afraid?"

She laughed.

"Afraid?—no, no—what I can do I can do—there is no Pandiani to scold me if they are not satisfied—that is my own *beezness*—is it right?—oh, I say to you, Leo, if you hear Pandiani when I refuse to go to Malta—you think you know the

Neapolitan deealet—dialect?—no, it is not good for you to know all the wicked words of Naples—and he is old and evil-tempered—it is no matter. But in this theatre there is no Pandiani and his curses—”

“No, no, not curses, Nina,” he said. “I see old Debernardi has taught you some strange English. Of course the Maestro did not use curses to his favourite pupil—oh, yes, you were, Nina, a great favourite, though he was always grumbling and growling. However, remember this, Nina, you must sing your best this evening, and impress them; and I shouldn’t wonder if Lehmann gave you exceptional terms.”

“More *beezness*?” she said, with a smile that showed a gleam of her pretty teeth: the sound of the word had tickled her ear somehow: more than once, as the cab rolled away down Kensington-wards, he could hear her repeat to herself—*‘beezness! beezness!’*

This young Italian lady seemed to produce a most favourable impression on the little, pale-faced widow, who appeared to be very grateful to Mr. Lionel Moore for having thought of her. The ground-floor, sitting-room and bedroom she explained, were occupied by her sole lodger: the

young lady could have the choice of any of the apartments above. The young lady, as it turned out, was startled beyond measure at the price she was asked to pay (which, in truth, was quite moderate, for the rooms were good rooms, in a good situation, and neatly furnished) and it was only on Lionel's insisting on it that she consented to take the apartments on the second floor.

"I beg you not miscomprehend," Nina said, somewhat earnestly, to the little landlady (for was she not a friend of Leo's?). "The price is perhaps not too large—it is to me that it is large—"

"Oh, that's all right, Nina," Lionel broke in, "that's all settled. You see, Mrs. Grey, Miss Rossi has come over here to get an engagement in comedy-opera, or perhaps to sing at concerts; and if a manager calls to see her on business, why, of course she must be in decent rooms. You can't go and live in a slum. Mrs. Grey knows what managers are, Nina; you must take up a good position and hold your own; and—and, in fact, Nina, when you are in London, you can't afford to go and climb those frightful Neapolitan stairs and hide yourself in a garret. So it's settled; and I'm going out directly to hire a piano for you."

“For how much expense, Leo?” she said, anxiously.

“Oh, we’ll see about that by and by,” said he.

He then explained to Mrs. Grey that Miss Nina was that very evening going along to the New Theatre to be heard by the manager and the conductor; that thereafter she wished to see the performance of *The Squire’s Daughter*, in which she hoped ere long to take a part herself; and that, if Mrs. Grey could find it convenient to accompany the young lady, it would be a very great obligation to him, Mr. Moore. Mrs. Grey replied to this that her solitary lodger had gone down to Richmond for two or three days; she herself had no engagement of any kind for that evening; and when, she asked, did any one ever hear of an old actress refusing an invitation to go to the theatre?

“So that’s all settled too,” said this young man, who seemed to be carrying everything his own way.

Then he went out and hired a piano—necessarily a small upright—which was to be taken down to Sloane Street that same evening; next he sought out a telegraph-office, and sent a message to Mr. Lehmann and to Mr. Carey; finally he called at

a florist's and bought a whole heap of flowers for the better decoration of Signorina Rossi's new apartments. In this last affair he was really outrageously extravagant, even for one who was habitually careless about his expenditure ; but he said to himself—

“ Well, I throw away lots of money in compliments to people who are quite indifferent to me ; and why shouldn't I allow myself a little latitude when it is my old comrade Nina who has come over to England ? ”

When at length he got back to the house he found it would soon be time for them to be thinking of getting down to the theatre ; so he said—

“ Now, look here, Mrs. Grey, when Miss Nina has done with her singing and her talk with the manager, you must take her to some restaurant and get some dinner for both of you, for you can't go on without anything until eleven. You will just have time before the performance begins. I'm sorry I can't take you ; but, you see, as soon as I hear what the manager says, I must be off to dress for my part. Then at the end of the performance I can't ask you to wait for me ; you will have to bring her home, either in a cab or by the Underground, for Nina is very economical. I hope you

won't think I am treating you ill in leaving you to yourselves—— ”

“ Why, Leo, you have given up the whole day to me ! ” Nina exclaimed.

“ You gave up many an afternoon to me, Nina,” he rejoined, “ when I sprained my ankle down at that confounded Castello Dell' Ovo.”

The ordeal that the *débutante* had now to undergo was of course made remarkably easy for her through the intervention of this good friend of hers. When they got down to the theatre, they went at once on to the stage, where Nina found herself in the midst of an old-fashioned English village, with a gaily-bedecked Maypole just behind her, while in front of her was the great, gaunt, empty, musty-smelling building, filled with a dim twilight, though also there were here and there one or two orange points of gas. Lionel sent a messenger to the manager's office, and also told him to ask if Mr. Carey had come ; then he opened Nina's roll of music for her, and began to discuss with her which piece she should choose. Fortunately Mr. Lehmann had not yet left—here he was—a stout, clean-shaven, sharp-eyed sort of man, in a frock-coat and a remarkably shiny hat : he glanced at the young lady in what she

considered a very rude and unwarrantable manner, but the fact was he was merely, from a business point of view, trying to guess what her figure was like. Lionel explained all the circumstances of the case to him, and gave it as his own confident opinion that as soon as they had heard Miss Rossi sing there would be little doubt of her being engaged. At the same moment Mr. Carey appeared—a tall, blonde, extremely handsome person of the fashion-plate sort; and at a word from the manager, two or three scene-shifters went and wheeled on to the stage a small upright piano.

Nina did not seem at all disconcerted by their business-like air and want of little formal politenesses. Quite calmly she took out 'Caro nome' from her music, and handed it to the conductor, who was at the piano. He glanced at the sheet; appeared a little surprised; but struck the opening chords for her. Then Nina sang; and though for a second or two the sound of her own voice in this huge empty building seemed strange—seemed wrong almost and unnatural—she had speedily recovered confidence, and was determined she would bring no discredit upon her friend Leo. Very well indeed she sang; and Lionel was delighted;

while of course Mr. Carey was professionally interested in hearing for the first time a voice so fresh and pure and so perfectly trained ; but when she had finished, the manager merely said—

“ Thank you, that will do : I needn’t trouble you further.” Then, after a word or two partly aside with Mr. Carey, he turned to Lionel and abruptly asked what salary she wanted—just as if Lionel had brought him some automaton and made it work.

“ I think you ought to give her a very good salary,” the young man said, in an undertone ; “ she has studied under Pandiani at Naples. And if I were you, I wouldn’t ask her to sing in the chorus at all ; I would rather keep a voice like that fresh and unworked, until she is fit to take a part.”

“ Singing in the chorus won’t hurt her,” said he, briefly, “ for a while at least, and she’ll become familiar with the stage.”

But here Lionel drew the manager still further aside ; and then ensued a conversation which neither Nina nor Mr. Carey could in the least overhear. At the end of it Mr. Lehmann nodded acquiescence, and said “ Very well, then ; ” and straightway he departed, for he was a busy man,

and had little time to waste on the smaller courtesies of life—especially in the case of débutantes.

Lionel returned to the young lady whose fate had just been decided.

“That’s all right, Nina,” he said. “You are engaged as under-study to Miss Girond, and you’ll have 3*l.* a week as soon as you have studied her business and are ready to take the part when you’re wanted. I will find you a full score, and you may get up some of the other music, when you’ve nothing better to do. The rehearsals of the under-studies begin on Monday—but I’ll see you before then and let you know all about it. You won’t mind my running away?—I’m on in the first scene. There is Mrs. Grey waiting for you—you must go and get something to eat—and when you come back, call at the stage-door, and you’ll find an envelope waiting for you, with two places in it—the dress circle, if it can be managed, for I want you to be some distance away from the orchestra. Good-bye, Nina!”

She held his hand for a moment.

“Leo, I thank you,” she said, regarding him with her dark eyes; and then he smiled and waved another farewell to her as he disappeared; and

she was left to make her way with her patient chaperon out of this great, hollow, portentous building, that was now resounding with mysterious clankings and calls.

And it was from a couple of seats in the back of the dress-circle that Mrs. Grey and her young charge heard the comedy-opera of *The Squire's Daughter*; and Lionel knew they were there; and no doubt he sang his best—for if Nina had been showing off what she could do in the morning, why should not he show off now, amid all these added glories of picturesque costumes and surroundings? Nina was in an extraordinary state of excitement, which she was unable altogether to conceal. Mrs. Grey could hear the little muttered exclamations in Italian; she could see how intently that expressive face followed the progress of the piece, reflecting its every movement, as it were; she caught a glimpse of tears on the long dark lashes when Lionel was singing with impassioned fervour his love-lorn serenade; and then the next moment she was astonished by the vehemence of the girl's delight when the vast house thundered forth its applause—indeed, Nina herself was clapping her hands furiously, to join in the universal roar of a recall—she was laughing with

joy—she appeared to have gone mad. Then at the end of the second act she said quickly—

“Mrs. Grey, can I send to him a note?—is there letter-paper?”

“Well, my dear, if we go into the refreshment-room and have a cup of tea, perhaps one of the young ladies could give us a sheet of writing-paper.”

And thus it was that Lionel, when he was leaving the theatre that night, found a neatly-folded little note awaiting him. He was in a considerable hurry; for he had to go home and dress and get off to a crush in Grosvenor Square, where he hoped to find Lady Adela Cunyngham, her sisters, and Miss Georgie Lestrangle (there was some talk of an immediate presentation of the little pastoral comedy) so that he had only time to glance over Nina’s nervously-pencilled scrawl. Thus it ran—

‘Leo, it is magnificent, it is splendid, you are a true artist, to-morrow I write to Pandiani, he will be overjoyed as I am. But Miss Burgoyne—*no, no, no*—she is not artist at all—she is negligent of her part, of the others in the scene—she puts up her fan, and talks to you from behind it—why you allow that?—it is insult to the public!

She *believes* not her part; and makes all the rest false. What a shame to you, Leo; but your splendid voice, your fine timbre, carries everything! Bravo, my Leo! It is a great trionf, brilliant, beautiful, and Nina is proud of her friend. Good night from

‘NINA.’

As Lionel was spinning along Piccadilly in his swift hansom, it occurred to him that if Nina were going to join the *Squire's Daughter* company, it might be just as well for her not to have any preconceived antipathy against Miss Burgoyne. For Miss Burgoyne was an important person at the New Theatre.

CHAPTER IV.

COUNTRY AND TOWN.

ON this Sunday morning, when all the good people had gone to church, there was no sign of life on these far-stretching Winstead Downs. The yellow roads intersecting the undulations of black-and-golden gorse were undisturbed by even a solitary tramp; so that Lionel Moore and his friend Mangan, as they idly walked along, seemed to be the sole possessors of the spacious landscape. It was a beautiful morning, warm and clear and sunny; a southerly breeze stirred the adjacent elms into a noise as of the sea, caused the chestnuts to wave their great branches bearing thousands of milky minarets, and sent waves of shadows across the silken grey-green of a field of rye. There was a windmill on a distant height, its long arms motionless. A strip of Scotch firs stood black and near at one portion of the horizon; but elsewhere

the successive lines of wood and hill faded away into the south, becoming of a paler and paler hue until they disappeared in a silvery mist. The air was sweet with the resinous scent of the furze. In short, it was a perfect day in early June, on a wide, untenanted, high-lying Surrey common.

And Maurice Mangan, in his aimless, desultory fashion, was inveighing against the vanity of the life led by certain classes in the great Babylon out of which he had just haled his rather unwilling friend; and describing their mad and frantic efforts to wrest themselves free of the demon ennui; and their ceaseless, eager clamour for hurry and excitement, lest, in some unguarded moment of silence, their souls should speak.

“It is quite a fallacy,” he was saying, as he walked carelessly onwards, his head thrown forward a little, his hands clasped behind his back, his stick trailing after him, “it is altogether a fallacy to talk of the ‘complaining millions of men’ who ‘darken in labour and pain.’ It is the hard-working millions of mankind who are the happiest; their constant labour brings content; the riddle of the painful earth doesn’t vex them—they have no leisure; they don’t fear the hour of sleep—they welcome it. It is the rich, who find time drag

remorselessly on their hands, who have desperately to invent occupations and a whirl of amusements, who keep pursuing shadows they can never lay hold of, who are really in a piteous case ; and I suppose you take credit to yourself, Linn, my boy, that you are one of the distractions that help them to lighten the unbearable weariness of their life. Well," he continued, in his rambling way, "it isn't quite what I had looked forward to ; I had looked forward to something different for you. I can remember, when we used to have our long Sunday walks in those days, what splendid ambitions you had for yourself, and how you were all burning to begin—the organist of Winstead Church was to produce his Hallelujah Chorus, and the nations were to listen ; and the other night, when I was in your room at the theatre, when I saw you smearing your face and decking yourself out for exhibition before a lot of fashionable idlers, I could not help saying to myself, ' And this is what Linn Moore has come to ! ' "

"Yes, that is what Linn Moore has come to," the other said, with entire good nature. "And what has Maurice Mangan come to? I can remember when Maurice Mangan was to be a great poet, a great metaphysician, a great—I don't know

what. Winstead was far too small a place for him ; he was to go up and conquer London, and do great and wonderful things. And what is he now ?—a reporter of the gabble of the House of Commons.”

“ I suppose I am a failure,” said this tall, thin, contemplative-looking man who spoke quite dispassionately of himself just as he spoke with a transparent honesty and simplicity of his friend. “ But at least I have kept myself to myself—I haven’t sold myself over to the Moloch of fashion—— ”

“ Oh, your dislike of fashionable people is a mere bundle of prejudice ! ” Lionel cried. “ The truth is, Maurice, you don’t know those fashionable people you seem to despise so heartily. If you did, you would discover that they had the ordinary human qualities of other people—only that they are better educated and more courteous and pleasant in manner. Then their benevolence—if you knew how much they give away in charity—— ”

“ Benevolence ! ” Mangan broke in, impatiently. “ What is benevolence ! It is generally nothing more or less than an expression of your own satisfaction with yourself. You are stuffed with food and wine ; your purse is gorged ; here’s a handful of sovereigns for you, you poor devil

crouching at the corner ! What merit is in that ? Do you call that a virtue ? But where charity really becomes a heroism, Linn, is when a poor, suffering, neuralgic woman, without any impulse from abundance of health or abundance of comfort, sets laboriously to work to do what she can for her fellow-creatures. Then that is something to regard—that is, something to admire—— ”

Lionel burst out laughing.

“ A very pretty description of Francie Wright ! ” he cried. “ Francie a poor, suffering, wretched woman—because she happened to have a touch of neuralgia the last Sunday you were down here ! There’s very little of the poor and suffering about Francie ; she’s as contented and merry a lass as you’d find anywhere.”

Mangan was silent for a second or two ; and then he said, with a little hesitation—

“ Didn’t you tell me Miss Wright had not been up yet to see *The Squire’s Daughter* ? ”

“ No, she has not,” Lionel answered lightly. “ I don’t know whether you have been influencing her, Maurice, or whether you have picked up some of her highly superior prejudices ; anyhow, I rather fancy she doesn’t quite approve of the theatre—I mean, I don’t think she approves of the New

Theatre, for she'd go to any other one fast enough, I suppose, if you could only get her away from her sick children. But not the New Theatre, apparently. Perhaps she doesn't care to see me making myself a motley to the view."

"She has a great regard for you, Linn. I wouldn't call her opinions prejudices," Mangan said—but with the curious diffidence he displayed whenever he spoke of Lionel's cousin.

"Oh, Francie should have lived in the fifteenth century—she would have been a follower of Savonarola," Lionel said, with a laugh. "She's far too exalted for these present days."

"Well, Linn," said his friend, "I'm glad you know at least one person who has some notion of duty and self-sacrifice, who has some fineness of perception, and some standard of conduct and aim to go by. Why, those people you associate so much with now seem to have but one pursuit—the pursuit of pleasure, the gratification of every selfish whim; they seem to have no consciousness of the mystery surrounding life—of the fact that they themselves are inexplicable phantoms whose very existence might make them pause and wonder and ask: no, it is the amassing of wealth, and the expending of it, that is all sufficient. I used to

wonder why God should have chosen the Jews, of all the nations of the earth, for the revelation that there was something nobler than the acquisition of riches ; but I suppose it was because no race ever needed it so much. And what new revelation—what new message is coming to the multitudes here in England who are living in a paradise of sensual gratification, blinded, besotted, their world a sort of gorgeous pig-stye—”

“Oh, that’s all right,” Lionel said, cheerfully. “Octavius Quirk has settled all that. The cure for everything is to be a blowing of the whole social fabric to bits. Then we’re going to begin all over again ; and the New Jerusalem will be reached when each man has to dig for his own potatoes.”

“Quirk !” said Maurice Mangan, contemptuously : and then he took out his watch : “We’d better be getting back, Linn. We’ll just be in time to meet your people coming out of church.”

So they turned and walked leisurely across the gorse-covered downs until they reached the broad and dusty highway leading towards Winstead village. And then again they struck into a by-lane with tall hedges, the banks underneath which were bright with stitchwort and speedwell and white .

dead-nettle. Now and again, through a gap or a gate, they caught a glimpse of the lush meadows golden with buttercups: in one of them there was a small black pony standing in the shadow of a wide-spreading elm. They passed some cottages with pretty gardens in front: they stopped for a second to look at the old-fashioned columbine and monkshood, the none-so-pretty, the yellow and crimson wall-flower, the pæony roses. Then always around them was this gracious silence, which seemed so strange after the roar of London; and if the day promised to become still hotter, at least they had this welcome breeze, that rustled the quick-glancing poplars, and stirred the white-laden hawthorns, and kept the long branches of the wych-elms and chestnuts swaying hither and thither. They were not talking much now: one of them was thinking of a pair of grey eyes.

At last they came to a turnstile, and, passing through that, found themselves in one of those wide meadows: at the farther side of it the red-tiled roof, the grey belfry, and slated spire of Winstead Church just showed above the masses of green foliage. They crossed the meadow, and entered the churchyard. A perfect silence reigned over the place; they could not hear what was

going on within the small building ; out here there was no sound save the chirping of the birds and the continuous murmur of the trees. They walked about looking thoughtfully at the gravestones—many of them bearing names familiar enough to them in bygone years. And perhaps one or other of them may have been fancying that when the great, busy world had done with him, and used him up and thrown him aside, here at least there would be peace preserved for him—an ample sufficiency of rest under this greensward, with perhaps a few flowers put there by some kindly hand. The dead did not seem to need much pity on this tranquil day.

Then into the universal silence came suddenly a low booming sound that caused Lionel Moore's heart to stand still : it was the church organ—that awakened a multitude of associations and recollections, that seemed to summon up the vanished years, and the dreams of his youth, when it was he himself who used to sit at the instrument and call forth those massive chords and solemn tones. Something of his boyhood came back to him ; he seemed again to be looking forward to an unknown future ; wondering and eager, he painted visions ; and always in them, to share his greatness and his

fame, there was some radiant creature, smiling-eyed, who would be at his side in sorrow and in joy, through the pain of striving and in the rapture of triumph. And now—now that the years had developed themselves—what had become of these wistful hopes and forecasts? Boyish nonsense, he would have said (except just at such a moment as this, when the sudden sound of the organ seemed to call back so much). He had encountered the realities of life since then; he had chosen his profession; he had studied hard; he had achieved a measure of fame. And the beautiful and wonderful being who was to share his triumphs with him? Well, he had never actually beheld her. A glimmer here and there, in a face or a form, had taken his fancy captive more than once; but he remained heart-whole; he was too much occupied, he laughingly assured Maurice Mangan again and again, to have the chance of falling in love.

“Getting married?” he would say. “My dear fellow, I haven’t time; I’m far too busy to think of getting married.”

So the radiant bride had never been found, even as the new Hallelujah Chorus that was to thrill the hearts of millions had never been written; and Linn Moore had to be content with the very pro-

nounced success he had attained in playing in comic opera, and with a popularity in the fashionable world of London, especially among the women-folk therein, that would have turned many a young fellow's head.

When they thought the service was about over they went round to the porch, and awaited the coming out of the congregation. And among the first to make their appearance—issuing from the dusky little building into this bewilderment of white light and green leaves—were old Dr. Moore and his wife, and Miss Francis Wright, who passed for Lionel's cousin, though the relationship was somewhat more remote than that. Maurice Mangan received a very hearty welcome from these good people; and then, as they set out for home, Lionel walked on with his father and mother, while Lionel's friend naturally followed with the young lady. She was not a distinctly beautiful person, perhaps, this slim-figured young woman, with the somewhat pale face, the high-arched eyebrows, and light brown hair; but at least she had extremely pretty grey eyes, that had a touch of shrewdness and humour in them, as well as plenty of gentleness and womanliness; and she had a soft and attractive voice, which goes for much.

“It is so kind of you, Mr. Mangan,” said she, in that soft and winning voice, “to bring Linn down. You know he won’t come down by himself : and who can wonder at it ? It is so dull and monotonous for him here, after the gay life he leads in London.”

“Dull and monotonous !” he exclaimed. “Why, I have been preaching to him all the morning that he should be delighted to come down into the quietude of the country, as a sort of moral bath after the insensate racket of that London whirl. But no one ever knows how well off he is,” he continued as they walked along between the fragrant hawthorn hedges, “it’s the lookers-on who know. Good gracious, what wouldn’t I give to be in Linn’s place !”

“Do you mean in London, Mr. Mangan ?” she asked, and for an instant the pretty grey eyes looked up.

“Certainly not !” he said, with unnecessary warmth. “I mean here. If I could run down of a Sunday to a beautiful, quiet, old-fashioned place like this, and find myself in my own home, amongst my own people, I wonder how many Sundays would find me in London ! You can’t imagine, you have no idea, what it is to live quite alone in

London, with no one to turn to but club-acquaintances ; and I think Sunday is the worst day of all, especially if it is fine weather, and all the people have gone to the country or the seaside to spend the day with their friends."

"But, Mr. Mangan," said Miss Francie Wright, gently, "I am sure, whenever you have a Sunday free like that, we should be only too glad if you would consider us your friends—unless you think the place too dreadfully tedious, as I'm afraid my cousin finds it."

"It is very kind of you—very," said he. "And I know the old Doctor and Mrs. Moore like to see me well enough, for I bring down their boy to them ; but if I came by myself, I'm afraid they wouldn't care to have an idling, dawdling fellow like me lounging about the place of a Sunday afternoon."

"Will you come and try, Mr. Mangan?" said she, quietly. "For Linn's sake alone I know they would be delighted to have you here. And if it is rest and quiet you want, can't we give you the garden and a book?"

"You musn't put such visions before me," he said. "It's too good to be true. I should be sighing for Paradise all through the week, and

forgetting my work. And shouldn't I hate to wake up on Monday morning and find myself in London!"

"You might wake up on Monday morning, and find yourself in Winstead," said she, "if you would take Linn's room for the night."

"Ah, no," he said, "it isn't for the like of me to try to take Linn's place in any way whatever. He has always had everything—everything seemed to come to him by natural right; and then he has always been such a capital fellow, so modest and unaffected and generous, that nobody could ever grudge him his good fortune. Prince Fortunatus he always has been."

"In what way, Mr. Mangan?" his companion asked, rather wonderingly.

"In every way. People are fond of him; he wins affection without trying for it; as I say, it all comes to him as if by natural right."

"Yes, they say he is very popular in London, amongst those fine folk," observed Miss Francie, quite goodnaturedly.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of his fashionable friends," Mangan rejoined. "Being made much of by those people doesn't seem to me one of the great gifts of fortune. And yet I wonder it hasn't

spoiled him. He doesn't seem the least bit spoiled, does he ? ”

“ Really, I see so little of him,” Miss Francie said, with a smile ; “ he honours us with so few visits, that I can hardly tell.”

“ No, he is not spoiled—you may take my word for it,” her companion said, with decision. And then he added : “ I suppose he gets too much of that petting ; he is kept in such a turmoil of gaiety that its evil effects have no time to sink into him. He is too busy—as he said this morning about marrying.”

“ What was that, Mr. Mangan ? ” she asked.

“ He said he was too busy to think of getting married.”

“ Oh, indeed ? ” she said, with her eyes directed towards the ground. “ We—we have always been expecting to hear of his being engaged to some young lady—seeing he is made so much of in London——” She could say no more, for now they were arrived at the doctor's house, which was separated from the highway by a little strip of front-garden. They passed in through the iron gate ; and found the door left open for them.

“ Well, Miss Savonarola,” said Lionel, as he

hung up his hat in the hall and turned to address her, "how have you been all this time?"

"I have been very well, Mr. Pagan," said she, smiling.

"And how are all those juvenile Londoners that you've planted about in the cottages?"

"They're getting on nicely, every one of them," she said, with quite an air of pride; and then she added: "When is your Munificence going to give me another subscription?"

"Just now, Francie," was the instant reply. "How much do you want?"

"As much as ever you can afford," said she.

He pulled from his pocket a handful of loose coin, and began to pick out the sovereigns. But Miss Francie, with a little touch of her fingers, put the money away.

"No, Linn, not from you. You've given me too much already. You give too freely; I like to have a little difficulty in obtaining subscriptions; it feels nicer somehow. But if my funds should run very low, then I'll come to you, Linn."

"Whenever you like, Francie," said he, carelessly; he poured the money into his pocket again; and bade Maurice Mangan come up to

his room, to get the dust of travel removed from his hands and face, before going in to luncheon.

Then while Mangan was busy with his ablutions in this small upper chamber, Lionel drew in a chair to the open window and gazed absently abroad on the wide stretch of country visible from the Doctor's house. It was a familiar view; yet it was one not easily to get tired of; and of course on such a morning as this it lost none of its charm. Everywhere in the warm breeze and the sunshine there was a universal rustling and trembling and glancing of all beautiful things—of the translucent foliage of the limes, the pendulous blossoms of lilacs and laburnums, the swaying branches of the larch, and the masses of blue forget-me-nots in the garden below. Then there were all the hushed sounds of the country—the distant, quick footfall of a horse on some dusty road; the warning cluck of a thrush to her young ones down there among the bushes; the glad voices and laughter of some girls in an adjacent garden—they, too, likely to be soon away from the maternal nest; the crow of a cock pheasant from the margin of the wood; the clear ringing melody of an undiscoverable lark. Everywhere white light, blue skies, and shadows of great clouds slow-sailing over the young green corn

and over the daisied meadows in which the cows lay half-asleep. And when he looked beyond that low green hill, where there were one or two hares hopping about on their ungainly high haunches, and past that great stretch of receding country in which strips of red and white villages peeped here and there among the woods, behold ! a horizon as of the sea, faint and blue and far, rising and ever rising in various hues and tones, until it was lost in a quivering mist of heat ; and he could only guess that there, too, under the glowing sky, some other fair expanse of our beautiful English landscape lay basking in the sunlight and sweet air of the early summer.

Of course Lionel was the hero of the hour when they were all assembled in the dining-room—at a very sumptuously furnished board, by the way, for the hale old doctor was fond of good living and a firm believer in the virtues of port-wine. Moreover, the young man had an attentive audience ; for the worthy old lady at the head of the table never took her admiring eyes off this wonderful boy of hers ; and Miss Francie Wright meekly listened too ; while as for Maurice Mangan, who was he in his humble station to interrupt this marvellous tale of great doings and festivities ?

Not that Lionel magnified his own share in these things: nay, he modestly kept himself out altogether; it was merely to interest these simple country folk that he described the grand banquets, the illuminated gardens, the long marquees, and told them how the Princess looked, and who it was who had the honour of taking her in to supper. But when he came, amongst other things, to speak of the rehearsal of the little pastoral comedy, in the clear light of the dawn, by Lady Adela Cunyngham and her friends, he had to admit that he himself was present on that occasion; and at once the fond mother took him to task.

“It’s wicked, Lionel,” she said, severely, “it’s downright wicked to keep such hours. Look at the result of it all. You can’t eat anything—you’re not taking a mouthful!”

“But, you know, mother, I’m not used to luncheon,” he said, cheerfully enough. “I have to dine at five every day—and I’ve no time to be bothered with luncheon, even if I could eat it.”

“Take a glass of port, my lad,” the old doctor said. “That will put some life into you.”

“No, thanks,” he said, indifferently, “I can’t afford to play tricks. I have to study my throat.”

“Why, what better astringent can you have

than tannic acid?" the old gentleman called down the table. "I suppose you drink those washy abominations that the young men of the day prefer to honest wine: what's that I hear about lemonade? Lemonade!" he repeated, with disgust.

"It's home-brewed—it's wholesome enough; Miss Burgoyne makes some for me when she is making it for herself," the young man said; and then he turned to his mother; "Mother, I wish you would send her something from the garden——"

"Who, Lionel?"

"Miss Burgoyne—at the theatre, you know. She's very good to me—lends me her room, if I have any swell friends who want to come behind—and makes me this lemonade, which is better than anything else on a hot night. Couldn't you send her something from the garden?—not flowers—she gets too many flowers, and doesn't care for them; but if you had some early strawberries or something of that kind, she would take them as a greater compliment, coming from you, than if some idiot of a young fool spent guineas on them at a florist's. And when are you coming up to see *The Squire's Daughter*, Francie? The idea that you should never have been near the place, when

I hear people confessing to each other that they have been to see it eight, and ten, or even a dozen times ! ”

“ But I am so busy, Lionel ! ” she said ; and then perhaps an echo of something that had been said in the morning may have recurred to her mind : for she seemed a trifle confused ; and kept her eyes downcast, while Lionel went on to tell them of what certain friends of his were going to do at Henley Regatta.

After luncheon they went out into the garden, and took seats in the shade of the lilac trees, in the sweet air. Old Mrs. Moore had for form's sake brought a book with her ; but she was not likely to read much when the pride of her eyes had come down on a visit to her, in his off-hand, light-hearted way. Maurice Mangan had followed the Doctor's example, and pulled out his pipe—which he forgot to light, however. He seemed dissatisfied. He kept looking back to the house from time to time. Was there no one else coming out ? There was the French window of the drawing-room still open : was there no glimmer of a grey dress anywhere—with its ornamentation of a bunch of scarlet geraniums ? At last he made bold to say to the Doctor—

“Where has Miss Francie gone to? Isn't she coming out too?”

“Oh, she's away after those London brats of hers, I have no doubt,” the old gentleman said. “You won't see her till tea-time, if even then.”—Whereupon Mangan lit his pipe, and proceeded to smoke in silence, listening at times and absently to Lionel's vivacious talking to his mother.

In fact, before Miss Francie Wright returned that afternoon, Lionel found that he had to take his departure; for there are no trains to Winstead on Sunday, and he would have to walk some three miles to the nearest station. When he declared he had to go, the old lady's protests and entreaties were almost piteous.

“You come to see us so seldom, Lionel! And of course we thought you'd dine with us, at the very least; and if you could stay the night as well, you know there's a room for Mr. Mangan too. And we were looking forward to such a pleasant evening.”

“But I have a long-standing engagement, mother: a dinner engagement—I could not get out of it.”

“And you are dragging Mr. Mangan away up to town again, on a beautiful afternoon like this,

when we know he is so fond of the country, and of a garden——”

“Not at all,” Lionel said. “I need not spoil Maurice’s day, if I have to spoil my own: he’ll stay, of course; and I suppose Francie will be back directly.”

“I’m sure, Mr. Mangan,” the old lady said, turning at once to her other guest, “if Lionel must really go, we shall be delighted if you will remain and dine with us—I hope you will—and you can have Lionel’s room if you will stay the night as well.”

“Thank you, I couldn’t do that,” said he, very gratefully, “but if you will have me, I shall be very glad to stay on, and go up by a late train. In the meantime, I think I’ll walk to the station with Linn.”

“And come back with a good appetite for dinner,” said the doctor, calling after him. “We’ll have something better than lemonade, I warrant ye!”

They have slow trains on these Surrey lines on Sunday; by the time that Lionel had got up to town, and driven to his rooms, and dressed, it was very near the hour at which he was due at the Lansdowne Gallery, where Lord Rockminster was

giving a dinner-party, as a preliminary to the concert and crush that were to follow. And no sooner had he alighted from his hansom, and entered the marble vestibule of the Gallery, than whom should he descry ascending the stairs in front of him but Mr. Octavius Quirk !

“Lady Adela hasn’t let the grass grow under her feet,” he said to himself. “Captured her first critic already !”

Lady Adela was at the head of the stairs receiving her brother’s guests ; and the greeting that she accorded to Mr. Octavius Quirk was of a most special and gracious kind. She was very complaisant to Lionel also, and bade him go and see if the place they had given him at dinner was to his liking. He took this as a kind of permission to choose what he wanted (within discreet limits) ; and as he just then happened to meet Miss Georgie Lestrangle, he proposed to that smiling and ruddy-haired damsel that they should go and examine for themselves—and perhaps alter the dispositions a little. So they passed away through those brilliantly-lit galleries (which served as a picture-exhibition on week-days) and at the farther end of the largest room they found the oblong dinner-table, which was brilliant with flowers and fruit,

with crystal and silver. Of course Lionel and his companion had to be content with very modest places; for this was a highly-distinguished company whom Lord Rockminster had invited; but at all events they made sure they were to sit together, and that arrangement seemed to be satisfactory to them both.

This was rather a magnificent little banquet; and Lionel, looking down the long, richly-coloured table, may once or twice have thought of the quiet small dining-room at Winstead (perhaps with the curtains still undrawn, and the evening light shining blue in the panes) and of the solitary guest whom he had left to talk to those good people; but indeed he was not permitted much time for reverie, for the young lady with the pince-nez was a most lively chatterer, she knew everything that was going on in London, and seemed to take a particularly active interest therein. Among other solemn items of information which she communicated to her companion, she mentioned that the issue of Lady Adela's novel had been postponed.

"Yes, it's quite ready, you know," she continued, in her blithe, discursive, happy-go-lucky fashion; "all quite ready; but she doesn't want it to go

before the public until there has been a little talk about it, don't you understand? She wants some of the Society papers to mention it; but she isn't quite sure how to get that done; and nobody seems able to help her—it's really distressing. Do you see that hideous creature down there at the corner?"

"Yes."

"He's a writer," observed this artless maiden, in mysterious tones.

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, he is—writes in all kinds of places. Why, now I think of it, Lady Adela said he was a friend of yours! I'm sure she did. So you pretend not to know him—is that on account of his complexion? Have you any more such *beauties* among your acquaintances, Mr. Moore? I thought he might be taking me in to dinner; and that's why I was so glad you brought me to look at the cards. Very rude, wasn't it; but you had permission, hadn't you? And there's another one coming to-night."

"Another what?"

"A writing man. But this other one is an American. Of course Lady Adela wants to have the curiosity of the American public excited just

as well as the English. Have you heard Lady Sybil's marching-song yet?"

"No."

"Well, I think it is charming—really charming. Rockminster was dining with the officers of the Boldstream Guards the other evening, and he promised to send a copy to the Bandmaster, as soon as it is published. But Sybil wants more than that, of course; she wants to see whether the Commander-in-Chief wouldn't recommend it, so that it could be taken up by all the regiments. Wouldn't that be splendid—to think that Sybil should provide a marching-song for the whole British Army!"

"Yes, indeed," said he, with great politeness. "And why shouldn't the Commander-in-Chief recommend it? A marching-song is as important as a new button. But I must get a look at the music, if we are all to join in the chorus."

The dinner was not long-protracted, for there was to be a concert during the evening; and indeed people began to arrive early—strolling through the galleries, looking at the pictures, or talking together in small groups. It was during this promiscuous assembling that Octavius Quirk got hold of Lionel, and with savage disgust drew

his attention to an ostler-looking person who had just come into the room.

“Do you see that ill-conditioned brute: what’s he doing here?”

Lionel glanced in the direction indicated.

“I don’t know who he is.”

“Don’t you know Quincey Hooper?—the correspondent of the *Philadelphia Roll Call*—a cur who toadies every Englishman he meets—and at the same time sneers at everything English in his wretched Philadelphia rag.”

Then Lionel instantly bethought him of Miss Lestrangle’s hint: was this the correspondent who was to arouse the interest of the great American Continent in Lady Adela’s forthcoming novel, even as Octavius Quirk was expected to write about it in England? But surely, with the wide Atlantic lying between their respective spheres of operation, there was no need for rivalry? Why did Mr. Quirk still glare in the direction of the new-comer with ill-disguised, or rather with wholly undisguised, disdain?

“Why,” said he, in his tempestuously frothy fashion, “I’ve heard that creature actually discussing with another American what sort of air a man should assume in entering a drawing-room!

Can you conceive of such a thing? Where *did* all that alarmed self-consciousness of the modern American come from—that unceasing self-consciousness that makes the American young man spend five-sixths of his waking-time in asking himself if he is a gentleman? Not from the splendid assurance, the belief in himself, the wholesome satisfaction of old John Bull. It's no use for the modern American to say he is of English descent at all!" continued this boisterous controversialist, who was still glaring at the hapless mortal at the door, as if every windy sentence was being hurled at his head. "Not a bit!—there's nothing English about him, or his ways, or his sympathies, or character. Fancy an Englishman considering what demeanour he should assume before entering a drawing-room! The modern American hasn't the least idea from whom he is descended: what right has he to claim anything of our glorious English heritage?—or to say there is English blood in him at all? Why, as far back as the Declaration of Independence, the people of English birth or parentage in the Eastern States were in a distinct minority! And as to the American of the future—look at the thousands upon thousands of Germans pouring into the country as

compared with the English immigration. That is the future American—a German; and it is to be hoped he will have some backbone in him, and not alarm himself about his entering a drawing-room! America for the Americans?—it's America for the Germans! I tell you this: in a generation or two the great national poet of America will be—Goethe!”

Happily at this moment Lady Adela came up, and Lionel most gladly turned aside, for she had evidently something to say to him privately.

“Mr. Moore, I want to introduce you to Mr. Hooper—to Mr. Quincey Hooper—he doesn't seem to know anybody, and I want you to look after him a little——”

No, no, Lady Adela, you must really excuse me,” said he, in an undertone, but he was laughing all the same. “I can't really. I beg your pardon, but indeed you must excuse me. I've just had one dose of literature—a furious lecture about—about I don't know what—oh, yes, immigration into America. And do you know this—that in a generation or two the great national poet of America will be Goethe?”

“What?” said she.

He repeated the statement; and added that

there could be no doubt about it, for he had it on Mr. Octavius Quirk's authority.

"Well, it's a good thing to be told," she said, sweetly, "—for then you know." And therewithal, as there was a sudden sound of music issuing from the next gallery, she bade Lionel take her to see who had begun—it was Lady Sybil, indeed, who was playing a solo on the violin to an accompaniment of stringed instruments, while all the crowd stood still and listened.

The evening passed pleasantly enough. There were one or two courageous amateurs who now and again ventured on a song; but for the most part the music was instrumental. A young lady, standing with her hands behind her back, gave a recitation, and attempted to draw pathetic tears by picturing the woes of a simple-minded chimney-sweep who accidentally killed his tame sparrow, and who never quite held up his head thereafter; he seemed to pine away somehow, until one morning they found him dead, his face downward on the tiny grave in which he had buried his little play-fellow. Another young lady performed a series of brilliant roulades on a silver bugle, which seemed to afford satisfaction. A well-known entertainer sate down to the piano and proceeded to give a

description of a fashionable wedding; and all the people laughed merrily at the clever and sparkling way in which he made a fool of—not themselves, of course, but their friends and acquaintances. And then Lionel Moore went to his hostess.

“Don’t you want me to do anything?” he said.

“You’re too kind,” Lady Adela made answer, with grateful eyes. “It’s hardly fair. Still, if I had the courage——”

“Yes, you have the courage,” he said, smiling.

“If I had the courage to ask you to sing Sybil’s song for her?”

“Of course I will sing it,” he said.

“Will you? Will you really? You know, I’m afraid those two girls will never give enough force to it. And it is a man’s song—if you wouldn’t mind, Mr. Moore——”

“Where can I get the music? I’ll just look it over.”

Quite a little murmur of interest went through the place when it was rumoured that Lionel Moore was about to sing Lady Sybil’s “Soldiers’ Marching Song;” and when he stepped on to the platform at the upper end of the gallery, people came swarming in from the other rooms. Lady Sybil herself was to play the accompaniment—the grand

piano being fully opened so as to give free egress to the marshalled chords ; and when she sate down to the keyboard, it was apparent that the tall, pale, handsome young lady was not a little tremulous and anxious. Indeed, it was a very good thing for the composer that she had got Lionel Moore to sing the song ; for the quite trivial and commonplace character of the music was in a large measure concealed by the fine and resonant quality of his rich baritone notes. The chorus was not much of a success—Lady Sybil's promised accomplices seemed to have found their courage fail them at the critical moment ; but as for the martial ditty itself, it appeared to take the public ear very well ; and when Lionel finally folded the music together again, there was quite a little tempest of clapping of hands. Here and there a half-hearted demand for a repetition was heard ; but this was understood to be merely a compliment to Lady Sybil ; and indeed Lionel strolled out of the room as soon as his duties were over. Fortunately no one was so indiscreet as to ask him what he privately thought of the "Soldiers' Marching Song," or of its chances of being recommended to the British Army by His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief.

When at length Lionel thought it was about time for him to slip away quietly from these brilliant, busy, murmuring rooms, he went to bid his hostess privately good-night.

“It was so awfully kind of you, Mr. Moore,” she said, graciously, “to give us the chance of making Mr. Quirk’s acquaintance. He is so interesting, you know, so unconventional, so original in his opinions—quite a treat to listen to him, I assure you. I’ve sent him a copy of my poor little book: some time or other I wish you could get to know what he thinks of it?”

“Oh, yes, certainly. I will ask him,” Lionel said; and again he bade her good-night, and took his leave.

But as he was going by the entrance into a smaller gallery, which had been turned into a sort of supper-room (there was a *buffet* at one end, and everywhere a number of small tables at which groups of friends could sit down, the gentlemen of the party bringing over what was wanted) he happened to glance in, and there, occupying a small table all by himself, was Mr. Octavius Quirk. Lionel at once made his way to him. He found him with a capacious plate of lobster-salad before him, and by the side of that was a large bottle of champagne.

“Going to sit down?” Quirk asked—but with no great cordiality: it was for one person, not for two, that he had secured that bottle.

“No; I dined here,” said Lionel, with innocent sarcasm.

“My dear fellow,” observed the other, earnestly, “a good dinner is the very best preparation in the world for a good supper.”

“I hear Lady Adela has sent you her book: have you looked at it?” Lionel asked.

“Yes, I have,” said the other, with his mouth full of lobster-salad. “Capital!—I call it capital! Plenty of verve and go—knowledge of society—nobody can do that kind of thing like the people who are actually living in it. Her characters are the people one really meets, you know—they are in the world—they belong to life. Oh, yes, a capital novel! Light, airy, amusing, sparkling—I tell you it will be the book of the season!”

“Oh, I’m very glad to hear that,” said Lionel, thoughtfully; and then he went and got his light over-coat and crush-hat, and descended the wide stone steps, and made his way home to his rooms in Piccadilly.

CHAPTER V.

WARS AND RUMOURS.

LITTLE could Lionel Moore have anticipated what was to come of his introducing his old comrade Nina to the New Theatre. At first all went well ; and even the prima donna herself was so good as to extend her patronage to Lionel's protégée ; insomuch that, arriving rather early at the theatre one evening, and encountering Nina in the corridor, she said to her—

“ You come into my room, and I'll show you my make-up.”

It was a friendly offer ; and the young Italian girl, who was working hard in every way to fit herself for the stage, was glad to be initiated still further into these mysteries of the toilet. But when she had followed Miss Burgoyne into the sacred inner room, and when the dresser had been told she should not be wanted yet awhile,

Nina, who was far from being a stupid person, began to perceive what had prompted this sudden invitation. For Miss Burgoyne, as she was throwing off her things, and getting ready for her stage-transformation, kept plying her guest with all sorts of cunning little questions about Mr. Moore—questions which had no apparent motive, it is true, so carelessly were they asked; but Nina, even as she answered, was shrewd enough to understand.

“So you might call yourself quite an old friend of his,” the prima donna continued, busying herself at the dressing-table. “Well, what do you think of him now?”

“How, Miss Burgoyne?” Nina said.

“Why, you see the position he has attained here in London—very different from what he had when he was studying in Naples, I suppose. Don’t you hear how all those women are spoiling him? What do you think of that? If I were a friend of his—an intimate friend—I should warn him. For what will the end be?—he’ll marry a rich woman, a woman of fashion, and cease to be anybody. Fancy a man’s ruining his career—giving up his position, his reputation—becoming nobody at all—in order to have splendid horses

and give big dinner-parties! Of course she'll have her doll, to drive by her side in the Park; but she'll tire—and then? And he'll get sick-tired, too; and wish he was back in the theatre; and just as likely as not he'll take to drinking, or gambling, or something. Depend on it, my dear, a professional should marry in the profession; that's the only safe thing; then there is a community of interests; and they understand each other, and are glad of each other's success. Don't you think so yourself?"

Nina was startled by the sudden appeal; but she managed to intimate that, on the whole, she agreed with Miss Burgoyne; and that young lady proceeded to expand her little lecture, and to cite general instances that had come within her own knowledge of the disastrous effects of theatrical people marrying outside their own set. As to any lesson in the art of making-up, perhaps Miss Burgoyne had forgotten the pretext on which she asked Nina to come to her room. Her maid was called in to help her now. And at last it was time for Nina to go, for she also, in her humble way, had to prepare herself for the performance.

But this friendliness on the part of the prima donna towards the young baritone's protégée did

not last very long. For one thing, Lionel did not come to Miss Burgoyne's sitting-room as much as he used to do, to have a cup of tea, and a chat with one or two acquaintances: he preferred standing in the wings with Nina, who was a most indefatigable student, and giving her whispered criticisms and comments as to what was going forward on the stage. When Miss Burgoyne came upon them so employed, she passed them in cold disdain. And by degrees she took less and less notice of Miss Ross (as Nina was now called), who, indeed, was only Miss Girond's understudy, and a person of no consequence in the theatre. Finally, Miss Burgoyne ceased to recognise Miss Ross, even when they happened to be going in by the stage-door of an evening; and Nina, not knowing how she had offended, nevertheless accepted her fate meekly and without protest, nor had she any thought of asking Lionel to intervene.

But worse was to befall. One day Lionel said to her——

“Nina, I never knew any one work harder than you are doing. Of course it's very handy your having Mrs. Grey to coach you; and you can't do better than stand opposite that long mirror and watch yourself doing what she tells you to

do. She's quite enthusiastic about you ; perhaps it's because you are so considerate—she says you never practice until the other lodgers have gone out. By the way, that reading dialogue aloud is capital ; I can hear how your English is getting freer and freer ; why, in a little while you'll be able to take any part that is offered you. And in any case, you know, the English audiences rather like a touch of foreign accent ; oh, you needn't be afraid about that. Well, now, all this hard work can't go on for ever ; you must have a little relaxation ; and so I'm going to take you and Mrs. Grey for a drive down to Hampton Court, and we'll dine there in the evening, in a room overlooking the river—very pretty it is, I can tell you. What do you say ? Will next Friday do ? Friday is the night of least consequence in a London theatre ; and if you can arrange it with Mrs. Grey, I'll arrange it with Lehmann ; my understudy is always glad of a chance of taking the part. You persuade Mrs. Grey, and I'll manage Lehmann : is it a bargain ? ”

So it came about that on a certain bright and sunny morning in June Lionel was standing at the window of a private room in a hotel near the top of Regent Street, where he proposed (for he

was an extravagant young man) to entertain his two guests to lunch before driving them down to Hampton Court. He had ordered the wine, and seen that the flowers on the table were all right; and now he was looking down into the street, vaguely noticing the passers-by. But this barouche that drove up?—there was something familiar about it—wasn't it the carriage he had sent down to Sloane Street?—then the next moment he was saying to himself——

“ My goodness gracious, can that be Nina ! ”

And Nina it assuredly was; but not the Nina of the black dress and crimson straw hat with which he had grown familiar. Oh, no; this young lady who stepped down from the carriage, who waited a second for her friend, and then crossed the pavement, was a kind of vision of light summer coolness and prettiness; even his uninstructed intelligence told him how charmingly she was dressed; though he had but a glimpse of the tight-fitting gown of cream-white, with its silver girdle, the white straw hat looped up on one side and adorned on the other with large yellow roses, the pale yellow gloves with silver bangles at the wrists, the snow-white sunshade, with its yellow satin ribbons attached. The vision of a moment—then

it was gone ; but only to reappear here at the open door. And who could think of her costume at all when Nina herself came forward, with the pretty, pale, foreign face so pleasantly smiling, the liquid black eyes softly bespeaking kindness, the half-parted lips showing a glimmer of milk-white teeth.

“ Good-morning, Leo ! ”

“ Good-morning, Nina ! They say that ladies are never punctual ; but here you are to the moment ! ”

“ Then you have to thank Mrs. Grey—and your own goodness in sending the carriage for us. Ah, the delightful flowers ! ” said she, glancing at the table, and her nostrils seemed to dilate a little, as if she would welcome all their odours at once. “ But the window, Leo—you will have the window open ? London it is perfectly beautiful this morning !—the air is sweet as of the country—oh, it is the gayest city in the world ! ”

“ I never saw London fuller, anyway,” said he, as he rang the bell, and told the waiter to have luncheon produced forthwith.

Nina, seated at table in that cool summer costume, merely toyed with the things put before her (except when they came to the strawberries) ;

she was chattering away, with her little dramatic gestures, about every conceivable subject within her recent experience, until, as she happened to say something about Naples, Lionel cruelly interrupted her by asking her if she had heard lately from her sweetheart.

“Who?” she said, with a stare; and also the little widow in black looked up from her plate and seemed to think it a strange question.

“Don’t you pretend to have forgotten, Nina,” Lionel said, reprovingly. “Don’t you look so innocent. If you have no memory, then I have.”

“But who, Leo?” she demanded, with a touch of indignation. “Who—who?—who? What is it you mean?”

“Nina, don’t you pretend you have forgotten poor Nicolo Ciana.”

“Oh, Nicolo!” she exclaimed, with supreme contempt (but all the same there was a faint flush on the clear olive complexion). “You laugh at me, Leo! Nicolo! He was all, as they say here, sham—sham jewellery, sham clothes, all pretence, except the oil for his hair—that was plenty and substantial, yes. And a sham voice—he told lies to the Maestro about his wonderful compass—”

“Now, now, Nina, don’t be unjust,” he said.

“Mrs. Grey must hear the truth. Mrs. Grey, this was a young Italian who wanted to be better acquainted with Miss Nina here—I believe he used to write imploring letters to her, and that she cruelly wouldn’t answer them; and then he wrote to Maestro Pandiani, describing the wonderful tenor voice he had, and saying he wanted to study. I suppose he fancied that if the Maestro would only believe in the mysterious qualities of this wonderful organ of his he would try to bring them out; and in the meantime the happy Nicolo would be meeting Nina continually. A lover’s stratagem—nothing worse than that! What is the harm of saying that you could take the high C if you were in ordinary health, but that your voice has been ill-used by a recent fever? It was Nina he was thinking of. Don’t I remember how I used to hear him coming along the garden-paths in the Villa Reale—if there were few people about you could hear his vile falsetto a mile off—and always it was—

‘*Antoniella, Antonià,
Antoniella, Antonià;
Votate, Nenna bella, votate ccà,
Vedimmo a pettenessa comme te stà.*’

“Leo,” she said, with proud lips, “he never called me *Nenna mia*—never! He dared not!”

In another instant, he could see, there would have been protesting tears in her eyes; and even Mrs. Grey, who did not know the meaning of the familiar Neapolitan phrase,* noticed the tremulous indignation in the girl's voice.

"Of course not, Nina," he said, at once, "I was only joking—but you know he did use to sing that confounded 'Antoniella, Antonia,' and it was always you he was thinking of."

"I did not think of him, then!" said she, almost instantly recovering her self-control. "Him? No! When I go out—when I was going out in the *Risposta*, I looked at the English gentlemen—all so simple and honest in their dress—perhaps a steel watch-chain to a gold watch—not a sham gold chain to no watch! Then they looked so clean and wholesome—is it right, wholesome?—not their hair dripping with grease, as the peasant-girls love it. And then," she added, with a laugh, for her face had quickly resumed its usual happy brightness of expression, "then I grow sentimental. I say to myself 'These are English people—they are going away back to

* *Nenna mia*, or *Nenna bella* is the pet phrase used by the Neapolitan young man in addressing his sweetheart. *Nenna* has nothing to do with *Nina*, which is a contraction of *Antonia*.

England, where Leo is—can they take him a message?—can they tell him they were going over to Capri, and they met on the ship—on the steamer—an Italian girl, who liked to look at the English, and liked to hear the English speak? And then I say ‘No; what is the use; what would any message do; Leo has forgotten me.’”

“Oh, yes,” said he, lightly, “you must have been quite certain that I had forgotten my old comrade Nina!”

They got a beautiful, warm, sunny afternoon for their drive down to Hampton Court; nor was it fated to be without incident either. They had passed along Oxford Street and were just turning out of the crowded thoroughfare to enter Hyde Park—and Lionel, as a man will, was watching how his coachman would take the horses through the Marble Arch—when Nina said in a low voice—

“Leo!”

“Well?” said he, turning to her.

“Did you not see?”

“See what?”

“The carriage that went past,” Nina said, looking a little concerned. “Miss Burgoyne was in it—she bowed to you——”

“Did she? I didn’t see her—I’ll have to apolo-

gise to her to-morrow," said he, carelessly. "Perhaps the compliment was meant for you, Nina."

"For me? Ah, no. Miss Burgoyne speaks no more to me."

"She doesn't speak to you? Why?" he asked, in some amazement.

The young Italian lady made a little gesture of indifference.

"How do I know? But I am not sorry. I do not like her—no! she is not—she is not—straight-forward, is it right?—she is cunning—and she has a dreadful temper—oh! I have heard—I have heard such stories! Again she is not an artist—I said that to you from the beginning, Leo—no, not an artist: why does she talk to you from behind her fan, when she should regard the others on the stage? Why does she talk always and always to you when she has nothing to say?"

"Oh, but she finds plenty to say!" he observed.

"Yes," said Nina, contemptuously, "she has always plenty to say to you on the stage, if she has not a word the moment the scene is over. Why? You don't understand? You don't reflect? I will tell you, Leo, if you are so simple. You think she does not know that the public can see

she talks to you? She knows it well; and that is why she talks. It is to boast of her friendship with you, her alliance with you. She says to the ladies in the stalls 'See here, I can talk to him when I please—you are away—you are outside.' It is her vanity. She says to them 'You can buy his portrait out of the shop-window perhaps—you can ask him to your house perhaps—and he goes for an hour, among strangers—but see here—every night I am talking to him'——"

"Yes, and see here, Nina," he said, with a laugh, "how about my vanity?—don't you think of that? Who could have imagined I was so important a person! But the truth is, Nina, they've lengthened out that comic scene inordinately with all that gagging; and Miss Burgoyne has nothing to do in it: if she hides her talking behind her fan——"

"Hides?" said Nina, with just a trace of scorn. "No; she shows! It is display! It is vanity. And you think a true artist would so forget her part—would wish to show the people that she talks privately——"

"Miss Nina is quite right, you know, Mr. Moore," said the little widow in black, and she was entitled to speak with authority. "I didn't

think it looked well myself. A ballet-girl would catch it if she went on the same way."

"What would you have her do?" he said—for he was a very tolerant and good-natured person. "Sit and look on at that idiotic comic gag?"

"Certainly," said the little dame, with decision. "She is in the scene. She is not Miss Burgoyne; she is *Grace Mainwaring*; and she ought to appear interested in everything around her."

"Oh, well, perhaps I have been to blame," he said, rather uneasily. "I dare say I encouraged her. But really I had no idea the audience could have noticed it."

"It was meant for them to notice it," Nina said, vindictively; and then, as she would have nothing more to say on this wretched subject, she turned to look at the gay lilacs and laburnums in the neighbourhood of the Serpentine, at the shimmering blue of the wide stretch of water, and at the fleet of pleasure-boats with their wet oars gleaming in the golden sunlight.

Her equanimity was soon restored; she would have nothing further to say of Miss Burgoyne on such a gracious afternoon; and indeed when they had crossed the Thames at Putney, and got into the opener country down by Barnes and East

Sheen and Richmond, she was chattering away in her delight over everything they encountered—the wide commons, the luxuriant gardens, the spacious mansions, the magnificent elms, the hawthorn-trees, red and white, that sweetened all the soft summer air. Of course when they arrived at the top of Richmond Hill they halted for a minute or two at the Star and Garter to water the horses, while they themselves had a stroll along the terrace, a cup of tea, and a look abroad over the wide, hazy, dreamlike landscape stretching far out into the west. Then they crossed the river again at Richmond Bridge; they bowled along by Twickenham and Teddington; finally they drove through the magnificent chestnut-avenues of Bushey Park, which were just now in their finest blossom. When they stopped at the Mitre it was not to go in: Nina was to be shown the gardens of Hampton Court Palace: there would be plenty of time for a pleasant saunter before dinner.

Miss Burgoyne, indeed! Nina had forgotten all about Miss Burgoyne as the little party of three passed through the cool grey courtyard of the Palace and entered into the golden glow of the gardens—for now the westering sun was rich and warm on the tall elms and limes, and threw deep

shadows on the greensward under the short black yews. They strolled down towards the river, and stood for a long time watching the irregular procession of boats—many of them pulled by young girls in light summer dresses that lent some variety of colour to this sufficiently pretty picture. It was altogether an attractive scene—the placid waters, the soft green landscape, the swift-gliding boats, from which from time to time came a ripple of youthful laughter or song. And indeed Nina was regarding rather wistfully those maidens in palest blue or palest pink who went swinging down with the stream.

“Those young ladies,” she said, in an absent kind of way, to the little widow who was standing beside her, “it is a pleasant life they live. It is all amusement. They have no hard work; no anxieties; no troubles; everything is made gentle for them by their friends; it is one enjoyment, and again and again; they have no care.”

“Don’t be so sure of that, Miss Nina,” Mrs. Grey said, with a quiet smile. “I dare say many a one of those girls has worked as hard at her music as ever you have done, and has very little to show for it. I dare say many a one of them would be glad to change her position for yours—I mean, for the

position you will have ere long. Do you know, Mr. Moore," she said, turning to Nina's other companion, "that I am quite sure of this—if Miss Burgoyne's under-study was drafted into a traveling company, I am quite sure Miss Nina here could take her place with perfect confidence."

"I don't see why not," he said, as if it were a matter of course.

"Then you know what would happen," Mrs. Grey continued, turning again to the young lady, in whose future she seemed greatly interested. "Miss Burgoyne would want a holiday, or her doctor would order her to give her voice a fortnight's rest, or she might catch a bad cold—and then comes your chance! You know the music thoroughly; you know every bit of Miss Burgoyne's 'business'; and Mr. Moore would be on the stage, or in the wings, to guide you as to your entrances and exits. That will be a proud night for me, my dear; for I'll be there—oh, yes, I'll be there; and if I have any stage-experience at all, I tell you it will be a splendid triumph—with such a voice as yours—and there won't be any more talk of keeping you as understudy to Miss Girond. No," she added, with a shrewd smile, "but there will be something else. Miss Burgoyne won't like

it: she doesn't like rivals near the throne, from what I can hear. She'll try to get you drafted off into one of the country companies—mark my words."

"The country?" said Nina, rather aghast. "To go away into the country?"

"But look at the chance, my dear," said the little ex-actress, eagerly. "Look at the practice—the experience! And then, if you only take care of your voice, and don't strain it by overwork, then you'll be able to come back to London and just command any engagement you may want."

"To come back to London after a long time?" she said, thoughtfully; and she was somewhat grave and reserved as they walked idly back through the gardens, and through the Palace buildings, to the riverside hotel.

But no far-reaching possibilities of that kind were allowed to interfere with Nina's perfect enjoyment of this little dinner-party that had been got up in her honour. They had a room all to themselves on an upper floor; the windows were thrown wide open; even as they sate at table they could look abroad on the spacious landscape whose meadows and hedges and woods stretched away into distant heights crowned by a solitary wind-

mill. Indeed, the young lady was so rude as to leave the table more than once, and go and stand at the open window: there was a charm in the dying out of the day—in the beautiful colours now encircling the world—in the hushed sounds coming up from the stream—that she could not withstand. The evening glow was warm on the rose-hued front of the Palace and on the masses of sunny green foliage surrounding it; on the still blue river the boats were of a lustrous bronze; while the oars seemed to be oars of shining gold as they dipped and flashed. By and by, indeed, the glory faded away; the stream became grey and ghostly; there were no more ripples of laughter or calls from this side to that; and Nina resumed her place more contentedly at the table, which was all lit up now. She made her small apologies; she said she did not know that England was such a beautiful place. Lionel, who in no way resented her thus withdrawing herself from time to time, had been leisurely talking to Mrs. Grey of theatrical things in general; and now that coffee was coming in, he begged permission to light a cigarette. Altogether it was a simple, friendly, unpretentious evening, that did not seem to involve any serious consequence. As night fell, they set out on their homeward drive;

and through the silent country they went, under the stars. Lionel left his two friends at their door in Sloane Street ; and as he was driving home to his lodgings, if he thought of the matter at all, he no doubt hoped that he had given his friends a pleasant little treat.

But there was more to come of it than that. On the following evening Lionel got down to the theatre rather later than usual, and had to set to work at once to get ready, so that he had no opportunity of seeing Miss Burgoyne until he actually met her on the stage. Now those of the public who had seen this piece before could not have perceived any difference of manner on the part of the coquettish *Grace Mainwaring* towards the young gentleman who had so unexpectedly fallen in her way—to wit, *Harry Thornhill* ; but Lionel instantly became aware of it ; and while he was endeavouring, after the fashion of the young stage gallant, to convey to *Miss Grace Mainwaring* the knowledge that she had suddenly captured his fancy and made him her slave for life, he was inwardly reflecting that he should have come down earlier to the theatre, and apologised to Miss Burgoyne for the unintentional slight of the previous day. As soon as the scene was over, and

they were both in the wings, he hastened to her . (they had left the stage by opposite sides) and said—

“Oh, Miss Burgoyne, something very awkward happened yesterday—I am so sorry—I want to apologise——”

“I hope you will do nothing of the kind,” said she, haughtily, “it is quite unnecessary.”

“Oh, but look here, I’m really very sorry,” he was endeavouring to say when she again interrupted him :

“If you choose to go driving through London with chorus-girls,” said she, in measured and bitter tones, “I suppose your attention must be fully occupied.”

And therewith she marched proudly away from him : nor could he follow her to protest or explain, for he was wanted on the stage in about a second. He felt inclined to be angry and resentful ; but he was helpless ; he had to attend to this immediate scene.

Meanwhile Miss Burgoyne did not long preserve that lofty demeanour of hers ; the moment she left him her rage got the better of her, for here was the Italian girl most inopportunately coming along the corridor ; and just as poor Nina came

up, Miss Burgoyne turned to her maid, who was holding open the dressing-room door for her, and said aloud, so that everyone could overhear—

“ Oh, we don’t want foreigners in English opera ; why don’t they take a barrel-organ through the streets, or a couple of canaries in a cage ? ”

Nor was that all ; for here was Mlle. Girond ; and the smart little boy-officer, as she came along the passage, was gaily singing to herself—

*Le rôti, la salade,
L’amour, la promenade
A deux dans les
Dans les
Deux dans les
A deux dans les bluets !*

“ Oh, there’s another of the foreign chimpanzees ! ” exclaimed Miss Burgoyne, in her fury ; and she dashed into her room, and slammed the door behind her.

Mlle. Girond stood staring at the door ; then she turned to look at Nina ; then she burst out laughing.

“ Quel ouragan, grand Dieu ! ” she cried. “ Ma pauvre enfant, qu’allez vous faire maintenant ? ” She turned to the door and laughed again. “ Elle a la tête près du bonnet, n’est ce pas ?—Bon Dieu, elle s’enflamme comme de la poudre !—— ”

But Nina did not stay to make any explanation : somewhat paler than usual, and quite silent and reserved, she took up her position in the wings ; nor had she a word to say to Lionel when he came off the stage and passed her—with a nod and a smile of greeting—on his way to his room.

Then things went from bad to worse, and swiftly. On the very next afternoon, which was a Sunday, Lionel was about to walk down to Sloane Street, to have a chat and a cup of tea with Mrs. Grey and Nina ; but before going he thought he would just have time to scribble a piece of music in an album that Lady Rosamund Bourne had sent him and affix his name thereto. He brought his writing-materials to the table and opened the big volume ; and he was glancing over the pages (Lady Rosamund had laid some very distinguished people, mostly artists, under contribution, and there were some interesting sketches) when the house-porter came up and presented a card. Lionel glanced at the name—*Mr. Percival Miles*—and wondered who the stranger might be ; then he recollected that surely this was the name of a young gentleman who was a devoted admirer of Miss Burgoyne. Miss Burgoyne had, indeed, on one occasion introduced the young man to

him; but he had paid little heed; most likely he regarded him with the sort of half-humorous contempt with which the professional actor is apt to look upon the moon-struck youths who bring bouquets into the stalls and languish about stage-doors. However, he told the house-porter to ask the gentleman to step upstairs.

But he was hardly prepared for what followed. The young gentleman who now came into the room—he was a pretty boy, of the fair-haired English type, with a little yellow moustache, and clear grey eyes—seemed almost incapable of speech, and his lips were quite pale.

“In—in what I have to say to you, Mr. Moore,” he said, in a breathless kind of way, “I hope there will be no need to mention any lady’s name. But you know whom I mean. That—that lady has placed her interests in my hands—she has appealed to me—I am here to demand reparation—in the usual way—”

“Reparation—for what?” Lionel asked, staring at the young man as if he were an escaped lunatic.

“Your attentions,” said the hapless boy, striving hard to preserve a calm demeanour, “—your attentions are odious and objectionable—she will not submit to them any longer—”

“My attentions,” Lionel said. “If you mean Miss Burgoyne, I never paid her any—you must be out of your senses !”

“Shuffling will do you no good,” said this fierce warrior, who seemed to be always trying to swallow something—perhaps his wrath—“The lady has placed her interests in my hands: I demand the only reparation that is possible between gentlemen.”

“Look here, my young friend,” Lionel said, in a very cool sort of fashion, “do you want to go on the stage? Is that a specimen of what you can do? For it isn’t bad, you know—for burlesque.”

“You won’t fight?” said the young man, getting paler and more breathless than ever.

“No, I will not fight—about nothing,” Lionel said, with perfect good-humour. “I am not such an ass. If Miss Burgoyne is annoyed because I passed her on Friday without recognising her, that was simply a mistake for which I have already apologised to her. As for any cock-and-bull story about my having persecuted her with odious attentions, that’s all moonshine: she never put that into your head: that’s your own imagination—”

“By heavens, you shall fight!” broke in this

infuriate young fool, and the next moment he had snatched up the ink-bottle from the table before him and tossed it into his enemy's face. That is to say, it did not quite reach its aim; for Lionel had instinctively raised his hand, and the missile fell harmlessly on to the table again—not altogether harmlessly, either, for in falling the lid had opened and the ink was now flowing over Lady Rosamund's open album. At sight of this mishap, Lionel sprang to his feet, his eyes afire.

“I've a mind to take you and knock your idiotic brains against that wall,” he said to the panting, white-faced youth. “But I won't. I will teach you a lesson instead. Yes, I will fight. Make what arrangements you please: I'll be there. Now get out.”

He held the door open: the young man said as he passed——

“You shall hear from me.”

And then Lionel went back to Lady Rosamund's ill-fated album, and began to sponge it with blotting-paper, while with many a qualm he considered how he was to apologise to her and make some kind of plausible explanation. Fortunately the damage turned out to be less serious than at

first sight appeared. The open page, which contained a very charming little sketch in water-colour by Mr. Mellord, was of course hopelessly ruined ; but elsewhere the ink had not penetrated very far ; a number of new mounts would soon put that right. Then he thought he would go to Mr. Mellord and lay the whole affair before him, and humbly beg for another sketch (artists always being provided with such things) ; so that, as regarded the album, no great harm had been done.

But as he was sitting in Mrs. Grey's little parlour, at tea, Nina fancied he looked a little preoccupied and was not talking as blithely as usual, and she made bold to ask him if anything was the matter.

"Yes," said he, "something is the matter. I'm afraid I've made a fool of myself." And then he added, with a smile, "Nina, I'm going to fight a duel."

"A duel, Leo !" she said, faintly.

"Yes ; and what I fear about it is the ridicule that may follow. But don't be alarmed, Nina," he said, cheerfully, "I don't think I'm going to fall on the deadly field of battle ; I can take care of myself. The trouble is that the whole thing

is so preposterous—so absolutely idiotic! The fact is, what the young gentleman really wants is a thorough good caning, and there's nobody to give it him. Very well, he must have something else; and I propose to teach him a wholesome lesson. I'm not going to take the trouble of crossing over to France or Belgium—I dare say that will be the programme—for nothing. Then there's another thing, Nina: I am the challenged party; I ought to have the choice of weapons. Well, now, I am not a very good shot; but I'm considered a fair fencer; and I suppose you would say that I should be magnanimous, and choose pistols? Oh, no; I'm not going to do anything of the kind. There might be a very awkward accident with pistols—that is to say, if our bloodthirsty seconds put in more than half a charge of powder. But with swords I fancy I shall be rather master of the situation; and perhaps a little prod or a scratch, just to show him the colour of his own blood, will do him a world of good. It may turn out the other way, no doubt: I've heard of bad fencers breaking through one's guard just by pure ignorance and accident; but the betting is against that kind of thing."

“But what is it all about, Leo?” Nina exclaimed: she was far more concerned about this mad project than he appeared to be.

“Oh, I can’t tell you that,” said he, lightly, “without telling you the name of the lady—for of course there is a lady in it—and that is never allowed.”

Nina sprang to her feet, and stretched out her hand towards him.

“I know—I know!” she said, in a breathless sort of way: “Leo, you will not deny it to me—it is Miss Burgoyne! Ah, do I not know!—she is a serpent!—a cat!—a devil!—”

“Nina,” he said, almost angrily, “what are you talking about! Do you suppose Miss Burgoyne would want a duel fought just because I happened to pass her, by accident, without raising my hat?—it’s absurd.”

“Ah, there is more than that, Leo!” Nina cried, eagerly; and then she paused, in some hesitation and embarrassment. “Yes, there is more than that,” she repeated, as if with an effort, and there was a slight flush in the pretty pale face. “Why should I not say it to you? You are too simple, Leo. You do not understand. She wishes to have the reputation to be allied with

you—in the theatre—out of the theatre. Then she sees that you drive with me in an open carriage: she hates me—what more natural? And she is angry with you——”

“Now, Nina,” said he, “do you think any woman could be so mad as to want to have a duel fought simply because she saw me driving past in a carriage with Mrs. Grey and you—is it reasonable?”

“Leo, you did not see her last night,” Nina said, but still with a little embarrassment, “when she meets me in the corridor—oh, such a furious woman!—her face white, her eyes burning. As for her insulting me, what may I care? I am a foreigner, yes: if one says so, I am not wounded. Perhaps the foreigners have better manners a little?—but that is not of importance: no, what I say is, she will be overjoyed to have you fight a duel about her—why, it is glory for her!—every one will talk—your names will be joined in newspapers—when the people see you on the stage they will say ‘Ah, ah, he is back from fighting the duel; he must be mad in love with Miss Burgoyne.’ A duel—yes, so unusual in England—every one will talk—ah, that will be the sweetest music for Miss Burgoyne’s ears in the whole world

—prouder than a queen she will be when the public have your name and her name rumoured together. And you do not understand it, Leo ! ”

He had been listening in silence, with something of vexation deepening upon his features.

“What you say only makes matters worse and worse ! ” he exclaimed, presently. “If that were true, Nina—just supposing that were the true state of the case—why, I should be fighting a duel over a woman I don’t care twopence about, and with a young jackass whom I could kick across the street ! That is what I ought to have done !—why didn’t I throw him downstairs ? But the mischief of it is that the thing is now inevitable ; I can’t back out ; I declare I never was in such a quandary in my life before ! ”

“And you will go and put yourself in danger, Leo,” Nina said, indignantly, “that a deceitful woman has the pride to hear the public talk ! Have you the right to do it ? You say there are sometimes accidents—both with swords as pistols—yes, every one knows it. And you put your life in danger—for what ? You care nothing for your friends, then ?—you think they will not heed much if—if an accident happens ? You think it is a light matter—nothing—a trifle done to please a

boy and a wicked-minded woman? Leo, I say you have no right to do it! You should have the spirit, the courage, to say no! You should go to that woman and say—‘You think I will make sport for you?—no, I will not!’ And as for the foolish boy, if he comes near to you, then you take your riding-whip, Leo, and thrash him!—thrash him!—thrash him!” Nina exclaimed, with her teeth set hard: indeed, her bosom was heaving so with indignation that Mrs. Grey put her hand gently on the girl’s shoulder, and reminded her that Lionel was in sufficient perplexity, and wanted wise counsel rather than whirling words.

As for Lionel himself, he had to leave those good friends very shortly; for he was going out to dinner, and he had to get home to dress. And as he was walking along Piccadilly, ruminating over this matter, the more he thought of it the less he liked the look of it: not that he had been much influenced by Nina’s apprehensions of personal harm, but that he most distinctly feared the absurdity of the whole affair. Indeed, the longer he pondered over it, the more morose and resentful he became that he should ever have been placed in such an awkward position; and when he was

going upstairs to his room, he was saying to himself with gloomy significance :

“Well, if that young fool persists, I’d advise him to look out : I’m not going over the water for nothing.”

CHAPTER VI.

A DEPARTURE.

THERE was but little sleep for Nina that night. She was sick at heart to think that in return for the unceasing kindness Lionel had shown her since her arrival in England, she should be the means of drawing him into this foolish embroilment. She saw the situation of affairs clearly enough. Miss Burgoyne was an exacting, irritable, jealous woman, who had resented Nina's presence in the theatre almost from the beginning, and who had been driven into a sudden fury by the sight of Lionel (he taking no notice of her either) driving past with this interloping foreigner. Moreover, Miss Burgoyne was inordinately vain: to have the popular young baritone fight a duel on her account—to have their names coupled together in common talk—what greater triumph could she desire than that? But while Miss Burgoyne might be the ostensible cause of the quarrel, Nina knew who

was the real cause of it; and again and again she asked herself why she had ever come to England, thus to bring trouble upon her old ally and companion Leo.

And then in that world of visions that lies just outside the realm of sleep—in which great things become small, and small things acquire a fantastic and monstrous importance—she worried and fretted because Lionel had laughingly complained on the previous evening that henceforth there would be no more home-made lemonade for him. Well, now, if she—that is to say, if Nina—were in her humble way to try what she could do in that direction? It might not be so good as the lemonade that Miss Burgoyne prepared; but perhaps Lionel would be a little generous, and make allowance? She would not challenge any comparison. She and Mrs. Grey between them would do their best; and the result would be sent anonymously to his rooms in Piccadilly; if he chose to accept it—well, it was a timid little something by way of compensation. Nina forgot for the moment that within the next few days an unlucky sword-thrust might suddenly determine Lionel's interest in lemonade as in all other earthly things: these trivial matters grew large

in this distorted land of waking dreams : nay, she began to think that if she were to leave England altogether, and go away back to Naples, and perhaps accept an engagement in opera at Malta, then matters would be as before at the New Theatre ; and when Lionel and Miss Burgoyne met in the corridor, it would be ‘ Good-evening, Miss Burgoyne ! ’ and ‘ Good-evening, Mr. Moore ! ’ just as it used to be. There would be no Italian girl interfering, and bringing dissension and trouble.

But the next morning, when the actual facts of the case were before her clearer vision, she had better reason for becoming anxious, and restless, and miserable. As the day wore on, Mrs. Grey could hardly persuade her to run down to the Crystal Palace for the opening of the Handel Festival, though, as the little widow pointed out, Mr. Moore had procured the tickets for them, and they were bound to go. Of course, when once they were in the great transept of the Palace, in the presence of this vast assemblage, and listening to the splendid orchestra and a chorus of between three and four thousand voices dealing with the massive and majestic strains of the *Messiah*, the spell of the music fell upon Nina and held absolute sway over her. She got into a curious state

of exaltation; she seemed breathless; sometimes, Mrs. Grey thought, she shivered a little with the strain of emotion. And all the time that Mr. Santley was singing 'Why do the nations,' she held her hand tightly over her heart; and when he had finished—when the thrilled multitude broke forth into an extraordinary thunder of enthusiasm—Nina murmured to herself:

"It is—it is like to take my life-blood away."

But when they were in the train again, and on their way up to town, it was evident to her companion that the girl had returned to her anxious fears.

"Mrs. Grey," she said, suddenly, "I speak to Miss Burgoyne to-night."

"Oh, no, don't do that, Miss Nina!" said Mrs. Grey, with much concern; for she knew something of the circumstances of the case. "I hope you won't do that! You might simply make matters worse. Mr. Moore would not have spoken to you if he thought you would interfere, depend upon that. And if Miss Burgoyne is vexed or angry, what good would you do? I hear she has a sharp tongue: don't you try her temper, my dear," the little woman pleaded.

But Nina did not answer these representations;

and she was mostly silent and thoughtful all the way to town. When they reached London, they had some tea at the railway-station, and she went on at once to the theatre. She was there early; Miss Burgoyne had not arrived; so Nina lingered about the corridor, listening to Mlle. Girond's pretty chatter, but not hearing very much.

At length the prima donna appeared; and she would have passed Nina without recognition, had not the latter went forward a step, and said, somewhat timidly—

“Miss Burgoyne!”

“What?” said Miss Burgoyne, stopping short, and regarding the Italian girl with a by no means friendly stare.

“May I have a word with you?” Nina said, with a little hesitation.

“Yes: what is it?” the other demanded, abruptly.

“But—but in private?” Nina said again. “In your room?”

“Oh, very well, come in!” Miss Burgoyne said, with but scant courtesy; and she led the way into her sitting-room; and also intimated to her maid that she might retire into the inner apartment. Then she turned to Nina.

“What is it you want?”

But the crisis found Nina quite unprepared. She had constructed no set speech: she had formulated no demand. For a second or so she stood tongue-tied—tongue-tied and helpless—unable to put her passionate appeal into words: then all of a sudden she said—

“Miss Burgoyne, you will not allow it—this folly! It is madness that they fight about—about nothing! You will not allow it!—what is it to you?—you have enough fame, enough reputation as a prima donna, as a favourite with the public—what more? Why should you wish more—and at such a dreadful risk——”

“Oh, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” said Miss Burgoyne. “What are you talking about!”

“The duel—” said Nina, breathlessly.

“What duel?”

Nina stared at her.

“Ah, you do not know, then?” she exclaimed.

“What don’t I know!” Miss Burgoyne said, impatiently. “What are you talking about! What duel? Is it something in the evening papers. Or have you taken leave of your senses?”

Nina paid no heed to these taunts.

“You do not know, then,” she asked, “that—Mr. Moore is going to fight a duel—with a young gentleman who is your friend? No?—you do not know it?”

It was Miss Burgoyne’s turn to stare in amazement.

“Mr. Moore?” she repeated, with her eyes (which were pretty and coquettish enough, though they were not on the same plane) grown wide and wondering. “A friend of mine? And you come to me—as if I had anything to do with it?—Oh, my goodness!” she suddenly exclaimed, and a curious smile of intelligence began to dawn upon her face. “Has that young donkey carried the matter so far as that?”

But she was not displeased; nay, she was rather inclined to laugh.

“Well, that would make a stir, wouldn’t it? And how did you find it out?—who told *you*? A duel? I thought he was talking rather mysteriously yesterday morning—Conrad the Corsair kind of thing—glooms and daggers: so it was a duel he was thinking of? But they are not really going to fight, Miss Ross?” continued Miss Burgoyne, who had grown quite friendly. “You know

people can't give up an engagement at a theatre to go and fight a duel: it's only French gentlemen who have no occupation who do that sort of thing. A duel?—a real, actual duel—do you seriously mean it?"

The prospect seemed to afford her great satisfaction, if not even a cause for merriment.

"Miss Burgoyne, you will not permit it!" Nina exclaimed.

"I?" said the other. "What have I to do with it? If two men want to fight, why shouldn't they?" said she, with apparent carelessness.

"Ah, but you know well what you have to do with it," Nina said, with some touch of scorn. "Yes, you pretend; but you know it well. The young man he goes from you yesterday to provoke the duel—you have been talking to him—and yet you pretend. You say, why should they not fight? Then it is nothing to you that one friend or the other friend may be killed?—that is nothing to you?—and you know you can prevent it if you choose? You do not wish to interfere—it will be amusing to read in the papers! Oh, very amusing! And if the one is killed!"

"But you know, Miss Ross, they don't go such lengths nowadays," said Miss Burgoyne, with

great good humour. "No, no; it's only honour and glory they go out for; it's only the name of the thing; they don't want to kill each other. Besides, if two men mean to fight, how can a woman interfere? What is she supposed to know of the cause of the quarrel? These things are not supposed to be known."

"Then," said Nina, whose lips had grown still more indignant and scornful, "this is what I say: if anything happens, it is your conscience that will speak to you in after time. You wish them to fight, yes, for your vanity to be pleased!—you wish it said that they fight about you! And that is a triumph for you—something in the papers—and you do not care what harm is done if you are talked about! That is your friendship!—what do you care?—any one may be sacrificed to your vanity——"

"I suppose if they were fighting about you you wouldn't say a word against it!" observed Miss Burgoyne, coolly. In fact the vehement reproaches that Nina had addressed to her did not seem to have offended her in the least; for she went on to say, in the best of tempers: "Well, Miss Ross, I have to thank you for bringing me the news. But don't be alarmed: these dreadful

duels, even when they get into the newspapers, seldom show much harm done. And in the mean time will you excuse me?—Jane is grumbling in there, I know. Tell me anything you may hear about it by and bye—and meanwhile I am very much obliged to you.” So Nina found herself dismissed: neither her piteous appeal nor her indignant protest having had apparently any effect whatever.

But Miss Burgoyne, while transforming herself into *Grace Mainwaring*, had plenty of time to think over this startling position of affairs, and to consider how she could best use it to her own advantage. She had a nimble brain; and it may have occurred to her that here was a notable chance for her to display the splendid magnanimity of her disposition—to overwhelm Mr. Lionel Moore with her forgiveness and her generous intervention on his behalf. At all events, in the first scene in which these two met on the stage, *Harry Thornhill* became instantly aware that the merry and mischievous *Grace Mainwaring* appeared bent on being very friendly towards him—even while she looked curiously at him, as if there was something in her mind. Moreover, she seemed in excellent spirits; there was no perfunctory

‘drag’ in her give-and-take speeches with the adventurous young gentleman whom fate had thrown in her way. He was very well pleased to find the scene going so well; he sang his share in the parting duet with unusual verve; she responded with equal animation; the crowded house gave them an enthusiastic recall. But the public could not tell that even in the midst of this artistic triumph, the audacious young lover had his own thoughts in his head; and that he was really saying to himself—‘What the mischief is she at now?’

He was to learn later on in the evening. Just as he got dressed for the ball-room scene, a message was brought him that Miss Burgoyne would like to see him for a minute or two as soon as he was ready. Forthwith he went to her room, tapped at her door, entered, and found himself the sole occupant; but the next moment the curtain concealing the dressing-room was opened about five feet from the ground; and there (the rest of her person being concealed) he beheld the smiling face of *Grace Mainwaring*, with its sparkling eyes, and rouge, and patches, to say nothing of the magnificent white wig with its nodding sprays of brilliants.

“Just a moment, Mr. Moore,” said she, “and I shall be with you directly”—and therewith the vision was gone, and the crimson curtains came together again.

Very shortly thereafter the Squire’s Daughter came forth in all the splendour of her white satin and pearls; and she lost no time in letting him know why he had been summoned.

“You are a very bloodthirsty man,” said she, in accents of grave reproach (though her eyes were not so serious) “and I am ashamed of you that you should think of harming that poor boy; but I am not going to allow it—”

“Why, who told you anything about it!” he said; for he could not pretend not to know what she meant.

“A little bird,” she made answer, with much complacence. “And the idea that you should really want to do such a thing!—how many voices like yours are there wandering about in comedy-opera that you should consider you have any right to run such a risk? I don’t mean being killed—I mean catching a cold! I suppose you have got to take your coat and waistcoat off—on Calais sands—with a wind blowing in from the sea: that is a nice thing for your chest and throat, isn’t it?

Well, I'm going to step in and prevent it. I consider you have treated me very badly—pretending you didn't see me, when you were so very particularly engaged; but never mind; I never bear malice; and, as I say, I'm going to step in and prevent this piece of folly."

"Very much obliged, I am sure," he said, politely. "When men propose to fight, it is so extremely pleasant to find a woman appear to throw a protecting arm over them!"

"Oh, I am not going to be repelled by any of your ferocious sentiments," said she, good-naturedly. "I am a friend of both of you—I hope; and I won't have anything of the kind—I tell you, I won't allow it—"

"I'm afraid your intervention has come too late," said he quietly.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Oh, it isn't worth speaking about," said he. "The young gentleman went a little too far—he has got to be taught a lesson, that is all—"

"Oh, listen to him!—listen to his bloodthirstiness!" she exclaimed, in affected horror; and then she suddenly altered her tone. "Come, now, Mr. Moore, you're not seriously going to try to harm that poor boy! He is a very nice boy, as

honest and simple-minded as you could wish. And such a pretty boy, too—no, no, it is quite absurd—”

“You are right there,” said he. “It is quite absurd. The whole thing is absurd. But it has gone too far.”

Here Miss Burgoyne was called.

“Will you leave it in my hands?” she said, leisurely rising from her chair, and tucking up her long train so that she might safely pass into the wings.

“Certainly not,” said he. “You have no right to know anything about it. The quarrel was forced upon me; I had no wish to harm your pretty boy; nor have I much now—except in trying to keep myself from being harmed. But that is all over now; and this thing has to be seen through to the end.”

He held open the door for her; and then he accompanied her along the passage, and up the steps, until they were both ready for their entrance on the stage.

“Men are so obstinate,” said she, with an air of vexation; “so obstinate and foolish. But I don’t care: I’ll see if I can’t get something done: I won’t allow two dear friends of mine to do any-

thing so stupid if I can help it. Why, the idea!—getting into a quarrel with a harmless young fellow like that! You ought to have been kind to him for my sake—for he really is such a dear boy—so simple and good-natured——”

“*But where is Grace?*” said a voice out there in the wide ball-room; and as this was Miss Burgoyne’s cue, she tripped lightly on to the stage with her smiling answer—“*One kiss, papa, before the guests arrive.*” And, as it turned out, there was no further opportunity of talk that night between Miss Burgoyne and Mr. Lionel Moore.

But two days thereafter, and just as Lionel was about to go out for his morning ride, the house-porter brought him a card. It was Mr. Percival Miles who was below.

“Ask the gentleman to come up.”

Here were the preliminaries of battle, then. Lionel had a vague kind of notion that the fire-eating youth ought not to have appeared in person—that he ought to have been represented by a friend; however, it was not of much consequence. He only hoped that there would be no further altercation or throwing of ink-bottles: otherwise he considered it probable that this interview would terminate in a more English manner than the last.

The young gentleman came in, hat in hand. He was apparently very calm and dignified.

“Mr. Moore,” said he, slowly, as if he were repeating words already carefully chosen, “I am about to take an unusual course. I have been asked to do so—I have been constrained to do so—by the one person whose wish in such a matter must be respected. I have come to apologise to you for my conduct of the other day.”

“Oh, very well,” said Lionel, but somewhat coldly: he did not seem well satisfied that this young man should get off so easily, after his unheard-of insolence. Indeed, Lionel was very much in the position of the irate old Scotch-woman whose toes were trodden upon by a man in a crowd. ‘I beg your pardon,’ said the culprit. ‘Begging my paurdon ’ll no dae,’ was the retort, ‘I’m gaun to gie ye a skelp o’ the lug!’

“I hope you will accept my apology,” the pale-faced young gentleman continued, in the same stiff and embarrassed manner. “I don’t know whether it is worth while my offering any excuse for what I did—except that it was done under a misapprehension. The—the lady in question seemed annoyed—perhaps I mistook the meaning of certain phrases she used—and certainly I must

have been entirely in error in guessing as to what she wished me to do. I take the whole blame on myself. I acted hastily—on the spur of the moment; and now I am exceedingly sorry; and I ask your pardon.”

“Oh, very well,” Lionel said, though somewhat ungraciously. “But you see you are getting rather the best of this performance. You come here with a ridiculous cock-and-bull story, you threaten and vapour and kick up mock-heroics, you throw a bottle of ink over a book belonging to a friend of mine—and then you are to get off by saying two or three words of apology!”

“What can I do more?” said the humble penitent. “I have tried to explain. I—I was as ready to fight as you could be; but—but now I obey the person who has the best right to say what shall be done in such an affair. I have made every apology and explanation I could; and I ask your pardon.”

“Oh, very well,” Lionel said again.

“Will you give me your hand, then?” Mr. Percival Miles asked, and he somewhat timidly advanced a step, with outstretched palm.

“That isn’t necessary,” said Lionel, making no other response.

The fair-haired young warrior seemed greatly embarrassed.

“I—I was told—” he stammered; but Lionel, who was now inclined to laugh, broke in on his confusion.

“Did Miss Burgoyne say you weren’t to come away without shaking hands with me—is that it?” he asked, with a smile.

“Y—yes,” answered the young gentleman, blushing furiously.

“Oh, very well, there’s no trouble about that,” Lionel said, and he gave him his hand for a second; after which the love-lorn youth somewhat hastily withdrew, and no doubt was glad to lose himself in the busy crowd of Piccadilly.

That same afternoon Lionel drove down to Sloane-street. He was always glad to go along and have a friendly little chat about musical affairs with the eagerly enthusiastic Nina; and as this particular evening was exceedingly fine and pleasant, he thought he might induce her to walk in to the theatre, by way of Belgrave Square and the Green Park. But hardly had they left the house when Nina discovered that it was not about professional matters that Lionel wanted to talk to her on this occasion.

“Nina,” said he, with befitting solemnity, “I have great news for you. I am saved. Yes, my life has been saved. And by whom, think you? Why, by Miss Burgoyne! Miss Burgoyne is the protecting goddess who has snatched me away in a cloud just as my enemy was about to pin me to the earth with his javelin.”

“There is to be no duel, Leo?” she said, quickly.

“There is not,” he continued. “Miss Burgoyne has forbidden it. She has come between me and my deadly foe, and held up a protecting hand. I don’t know that it is quite a dignified position for me to find myself in; but one must recognise her friendly intentions anyway. And not only that, Nina, but she sent me a bottle of lemonade yesterday! Just think of it: to save your life is something, but to send you lemonade as well—that is almost too much goodness.”

Poor Nina! If this careless young man had only looked at the address on the wrapper of the bottle, he could easily have guessed whose was the handwriting—especially recognisable in the foreign-looking *L* and *M*. That timidly-proffered little gift was Nina’s humble effort at compensation; and now he was bringing it forward as a proof of Miss Burgoyne’s great good-nature! And

it was Miss Burgoyne who had intervened to prevent this absurd duel—Miss Burgoyne, who knew nothing at all about it until Nina told her ! Nina, as they now walked along towards Constitution Hill, was too proud to make any explanation : only she thought he might have looked at the address on the wrapper.

“Seriously,” he said to his companion, “seriously, Nina, she has put me under a very great obligation, and shown herself very magnanimous as well. There is no doubt she was offended with me about something or other : and she had the generosity to put all that aside the moment she found I was embroiled in this stupid affair. And mind you, I’m very glad to be out of it. It would have looked ridiculous in the papers ; and everything gets into the papers nowadays. Of course that young idiot had no right to go and tell her about the duel ; but I suppose he wanted to figure as a hero in her eyes—poor devil, he seems pretty bad about her. Well, now that her intervention has got me out of this awkward scrape, how am I to show my gratitude to her ?—what do you say, Nina ?”

But Nina had nothing to say.

“There’s one thing I can do for her,” he continued. “You know how fond actors and actresses

are of titled folks. Well, Miss Burgoyne is going down to Henley Regatta with a lot of other professionals ; and I am going too, with another party—Lady Adela Cunyngham has got a house-boat there. Very well, if I can find out where Miss Burgoyne is—and I dare say she will be conspicuous enough, though she's not very tall—I will take Lord Rockminster to pay his respects to her and leave him with her : won't that do ? They have already been introduced at the theatre ; and if Rockminster doesn't talk much, I have no doubt she will chatter enough for both. And Miss Burgoyne will be quite pleased to have a lord all to herself."

"Leo," said Nina, gently, "do you not think you yourself have too much liking for—for that fine company ? "

"Perhaps I have," said he, with perfect good-humour. "What then ? Are you going to lecture me too ? Is Saul among the prophets ? Has Maurice Mangan been coaching you as well ? "

"Ah, Leo," said she, "I should wish to see you give it all up—yes—all the popularity—and your fine company—and that you go away back to Pandiani——"

"Pandiani !" he exclaimed. "Here's romance, indeed ! You want us both to become students

again, and to have the old days at Naples back again—”

“No, no, no!” she said, shaking her head. “It is the future I think of. I wish to hear you in grand opera, or in oratorio—I wish to see you a great artist—that is something noble, something ambitious, something to work for day and night. Ah, Leo, when I hear Mr. Santley sing ‘Why do the nations’—when I see the thousands and thousands of people sitting entranced, then I say to myself ‘there is something grand and noble to speak to all these people—to lift them above themselves: to give them this pure emotion surely that is a great thing—it is high, like religion—it is a purification—it is—’” But here she stopped with a little gesture of despair. “No, no, Leo, I cannot tell you—I have not enough English.”

“It’s all very well,” said he, “for you to talk about Santley: but where will you get another voice like his?”

“Leo, you can sing finer music than ‘The Starry Night,’” she said. “You have the capacity. Ah, but you enjoy too much; you are petted and spoiled, yes; you have not a great ambition—”

“I’ll tell you what I seem to have, though,

Nina," said he. "I seem to have a faculty of impressing my friends with the notion that I could do something tremendous if only I tried ; whereas I know that this belief of theirs is only a delusion."

"But you do not try, Leo," said this persistent counsellor. "No ; life is too pleasant for you ; you have not enthusiasm ; why your talk is always *persiflage*—it is the talk of the fashionable world. And you an artist !"

However, at this moment Lionel suddenly discovered that this leisurely stroll was likely to make them late in getting to the theatre ; so that perforce they had to leave these peaceful glades of the Green Park and get into Piccadilly, where they jumped into a Hansom-cab and were rapidly whirled away eastward.

But if Lionel was to be reproached for his lack of ambition, that was a charge which could not be brought against certain of those fashionable friends of his at whom Nina (in unconscious collusion with Maurice Mangan) seemed inclined to look askance. At the very height of the London season, Lady Adela Cunyngham, and her sisters, Lady Sybil and Lady Rosamund Bourne, had taken the town by storm ; and it seemed probable

that before they departed for Scotland they would leave quite a trail of glory behind them in the social firmament. The afternoon production of *The Chaplet*, in the gardens of Sir Hugh's house on Campden Hill, had been a most notable festivity, doubtless; but then it was a combination affair; for Miss Georgie Lestrangle had shared in the honours of the occasion; moreover, they had professional assistance given them by Mr. Lionel Moore. It was when the three sisters attacked their own particular pursuits that their individual genius shone; and marked success had attended their separate efforts. His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief, it is true, had not as yet invited the Colonels of the British Army to recommend Lady Sybil's 'Soldiers' Marching Song' to the band-masters of the various regiments; but in default of that, this composition was performed nightly, as the concluding ceremony at the international exhibition then open in London; and as the piece was played by the combined bands of the Royal Marines, with the drums of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, the Highland Pipers of the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, and the drums of the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards, the resultant noise was surely sufficient to satisfy

the hungriest vanity of any composer, professional or amateur, who ever lived. Then not only had Lady Rosamund exhibited a large picture at the Lansdowne Gallery (a decorative work this was, representing the manumission of a slave, with the legend underneath '*Hunc hominem liberum esse volo*') but also the proprietors of an illustrated weekly newspaper had published in their summer number, as a coloured supplement, what she had ventured to call 'An all-the-year-round valentine.' She had taken the following rhyme (or perhaps some one had found it for her)—

*'In these fair Violets of the Veins,
The Verdure of the Spring remains ;
Ripe Cherries on thy Lips display
The lustre of the Summer day ;
If I for Autumn were to seek,
I'd view the Apples on thy Cheek ;
There's nought cou'd give me Pain in thee,
But Winter in thy Heart to see.'*

—and she had drawn four pretty little landscapes, which, when reproduced on one sheet by chromolithography, looked very neat and elegant ; while the fair artist was much gratified to observe her name figuring on the placards at railway-stations, or on the boards in front of stationers' shops, as she drove along Kensington High-street.

But of course the crowning achievement of the gifted family was Lady Adela Cunyngham's novel. If it was not quite the success of the season, as far as the outer world was concerned, it certainly was the most talked-of book among Lady Adela's own set. Every character in it was identified as somebody or another; and although Lady Adela, as a true artist, maintained that she did not draw individuals but types, she could not stem the tide of this harmless curiosity, and had to submit to the half-humorous inquiries and flattering insinuations of her friends. As for the outer world, if it remained indifferent, that only showed its lack of gratitude; for here, there, and everywhere among the evening and weekly papers (the morning papers were perhaps too busy with politics at the time) attention was drawn to Lady Arthur Castletown's charming and witty romance of modern life. Alp called to Alp, and deep to deep, throughout Satan's invisible world; *Kathleen's Sweethearts* was dragged in (apparently with ten men pushing behind) for casual allusion in 'Our Weekly Note-Book'; Lady Arthur's smart sayings were quoted in the gossip attached to this or that monthly magazine; the correspondent of a country journal would hasten to say that it was not necessary to

inform *his* readers that Lady Arthur Castletown was in reality Lady Adela Cunyngham, the wife of the well-known breeder of polled cattle, Sir George Cunyngham of the Braes. In the midst of all this Lionel went to his friend Maurice Mangan.

"Look here, Maurice," said he, "that book can't be as bad as you tried to make out."

"It is the most insensate trash that was ever put between boards," was the prompt reply.

"But how can that be? Look at what the papers say!"

"The papers—what papers? That isn't what the papers say—that is what the small band of log-rollers say, calling industriously to each other, like frogs in a pond. Didn't I tell you what would happen if you got hold of Octavius Quirk, or any one of them? How many dinners did your swell friends expend on Quirk?"

"Oh, I don't know. He is pretty often at the house."

"He is pretty often at the house, is he?" Mangan repeated.

"I hope they won't ask him to Scotland," Lionel said, ruefully. "I can't bear the fellow: it's just as you say, he's always in a whirlwind of insistence—about nothing; and he doesn't grin

through a horse-collar, he roars and guffaws through it. But then, you see, he has been very kind about this book; and of course a new author, like Lady Adela, is grateful. I admit what you say is right enough—perhaps the family are a little anxious for notoriety; but so are a good many other people; and there's no great harm in writing, or painting, or composing music as well as you can. Mind, I think there's a little professional jealousy about you, Maurice," continued the sage Mentor. "You don't like a woman of fashion to come into your literary circles. But why shouldn't she? I'm sure I don't object when any one of them tries to produce a little dramatic or musical piece: on the contrary, I would rather help. And look at Mellord—the busiest painter of the day—look at the trouble he takes in advising Lady Rosamund; she has the free *entrée* into his studio, no matter who is sitting to him. I think, for amateurs, the work of all the three sisters is very creditable to them; and I don't see why they shouldn't like to have the appreciation of the public, just as other people like it."

"My dear fellow," Mangan said, but with obvious indifference, "do you think I resent the fact of your friend Lady Arthur or Lady Adela

writing a foolish novel? Far from it. You asked my opinion of it, and I told you; if you don't see for yourself that the book is absolute trash—but harmless trash, as I think—then you are in a happy condition of mind, for you must be easily pleased. Come, let's talk of something worth talking about. Have you been down to Winstead lately?"

"No—never since that Sunday."

"Do you know, your people were awfully good to me," this long, lank, lazy-looking man went on—but now he seemed more interested than when talking about Lady Adela's novel. "I never spent a more delightful evening—never. I wonder they did not turn me out, though; for I stayed and stayed, and never noticed how late it was getting. Missed the last train, of course; and walked all the way up to London; not a bit sorry, either, for the night was cool and there was plenty of starlight: I'd walk twice as far to spend another such evening. I—I'm thinking of going down there next Sunday," he added, with a little hesitation.

"Why not?" Lionel said, cordially enough.

"You see," Mangan continued, still rather hesitatingly,—“the fact is—I'm rather in the way of getting illustrated papers—and—and summer

numbers—and children's books—I mean, when I want them, I can get them—for lots of these things come to the newspaper offices, and they're not much use to anybody; so I thought I would just make up a parcel and send it down to Miss Frances, don't you understand, for her sick children——”

“I daresay you went and spent a lot of money,” Lionel said, with a laugh.

“And she was good enough to write back that it was just what she wanted; for several of the children—most of them, I should say—couldn't read, but they liked looking at pictures. And then she was kind enough to add that if I went down next Sunday, she would take me to see how the things had been distributed—the pictures hung up on walls, and so forth—and—and that's why I think I may go down.”

“Oh, yes, certainly,” Lionel said, though he did not understand why any such excuse was necessary.

“Couldn't you come down too, Linn?” Mangan suggested.

“Oh, no, I couldn't, I'm so busy,” was the immediate reply. “I'm going to Scotland the first or second week in August. The doctor

advises me to give my voice a long rest; and the Cunyngghams have asked me to their place in Ross-shire. Besides, I don't care about singing in London when there's nobody but country cousins, and none too many of them. Of course I'll have to go down and bid the old folks good-bye before starting for Scotland, and Francie too. Mind you tell that wicked Francie that I am very angry with her for not having come up to see *The Squire's Daughter*."

"Linn," said his friend, after a second, "why don't you take the old people over to Aix or some such place for a month? They're so awfully proud of you; and you might take Miss Frances as well: she seems to work so hard—she deserves a rest. Wouldn't that be as sensible as going to Scotland?"

"My good chap, I would do that in a moment—I should be delighted," said he—for he was really a most generously-disposed young man, especially as regarded money: time was of greater consideration with him. "But it's no use thinking of such a thing. The old folks are much too content with home: they won't travel. And Francie—she wouldn't come away from those precious babes. Well, I'm off. Mind you scold Francie for me!"

“Perhaps,” said Mangan, as he accompanied his friend to the door.

So it was that on a certain evening in August Lionel Moore drove up to Euston Station and secured a sleeping-berth in the train going North ; and no doubt the consciousness that after a long spell of hard work he was entering upon a well-earned holiday was a very welcome and comfortable thing. If only he had been a little more reflective, he might have set to work (here in the railway-carriage, as he lit his cigar, and proceeded to fix up his reading-lamp) and gone on to consider how entirely satisfactory all his circumstances were at this moment. Prince Fortunatus indeed ! Was ever any one more happily situated ? Here he was, young, full of health and high spirits, excellent-tempered, and sufficiently good-looking ; he had acquired a liberal measure of fame and popularity ; he had many friends ; he had ample means, for he did not know the difference between a backer and a layer, nor yet the difference between a broker and a jobber—in fact, gambling either in Stocks or on the Turf had never even occurred to him as a thing worth thinking about. But there was something further than all this for which he ought to have been profoundly grateful. As

the long train thundered away into the night, there was no dull misery of farewell weighing heavily upon him; there were no longing fancies wandering wistfully back to a certain house, a certain figure, a pair of too eloquent eyes. He dragged no lengthening chain with him on this journey North. For notwithstanding his pleasant companionship with Nina, and her constant sympathy with him, and her interest in his professional career; notwithstanding the affectionate regard of his Cousin Francie, which was none the less sincere that it remained unspoken and only to be guessed at; notwithstanding the somewhat jealous favour which the prima donna of the New Theatre seemed inclined to bestow on him; notwithstanding the pert coquetries and fascinations of Miss Georgie Lestrangle, to say nothing of the blandishments and pettings showered upon him by crowds of ladies of exalted rank, this fortunate young man (so far at least as he was himself aware) was going away to Scotland quite heart-whole.

CHAPTER VII.

IN STRATHAIVRON.

It was still early in the afternoon when Lionel found himself driving along a loftily-winding road overlooking the wide and fertile valley of the Aivron. Right down below him, and visible through the birch-trees, was the river itself, of a brilliant clear-shining blue, save where in some more distant sweeps it shone a silver-white; on the other side of the broad strath rose a range of hill fringed along its base with wood, but terminating in the west in far altitudes of bare rock and heather; while now and again he could catch a glimpse of some still more distant peak or shoulder, no doubt belonging to the remote and mountainous region of Assynt. And there, in the middle of the plain, stood the shooting-lodge for which he was bound—a long, rambling building or series of buildings with all sorts of kennels and outhouses and deer-houses attached; and as he was regarding

this goal and aim of his journey, and wondering how he was going to get across the swift-flowing stream, behold! a white fluttering of handkerchiefs just outside the porch. It was a signal to him, he knew; and he returned it more than once—until, indeed, he discovered that his driver was leaving the road and about to take the horses down a rudely cut track on the hill-side.

“I say, isn’t there a bridge anywhere?” he asked: for he was not used to such exploits.

“Aw no, there’s no brudge,” the old Highland driver said, coolly, as he jammed down the brake. “But we’ll do ferry well at the ford; the watter is not so high the now.”

“And when the water is high, what do they do then?” Lionel asked—as he regarded with some concern the almost vertical pole and the straining harness.

“Aw, well, there uss a boat; and if there’s a spate on the ruvver they can come and go; but not with the heavy things. Ay, I hef seen tons of coal waiting for them at Invershin for near a fortnight when there wass a heavy spate on the ruvver. The leddies are so particular nowadays; peat will not do for them for the cooking; naw, they must hef coal——”

But now the horses were entering the stream, and the old man's loquacity ceased. The animals, however, seemed quite accustomed to this performance; without any hesitation they adventured into the rapid current, and splashed their way forward, getting such footing as was possible among the big loose stones and shingle. Indeed, the passage was effected with very little trouble, if with a good deal of jolting and bumping; and thereafter there was a pleasant trot along some sufficiently smooth greensward up to the door of the lodge.

Yes, here were the three tall and handsome sisters, looking very picturesque in their simple northern attire; and here was Miss Georgie Lestrangle conspicuous in a Tam o' Shanter of bright blue; and no sooner had the young man descended from the waggonette than they surrounded him, laughing and questioning, and giving him the heartiest of welcomes. How could he answer them all at once? When the poor man was taken into the dining-room, and set down to his solitary luncheon, they were all for waiting on him and talking to him at the same time.

"It is so awfully kind of you to come," Lady

Adela said, with one of her most gracious smiles. "Now we shall hear about something else than dogs and guns and grouse."

"Oh, Mr. Moore," cried Lady Rosamund (who was the youngest, and had a bit of a temper, and was allowed to interfere when she liked) "do you know a masque called *Alfred*? You do?—how delightful! Well, then, you remember the visions of the future Kings and Queens that pass before Alfred when he is in the Isle of Athelney: how can I get that done in the open air? What kind of gauze do you use in the theatre? Could you get me a bit? And would painted shades do instead of living persons?—you see we have so few people to come and go on up here."

"And, Mr. Moore," cried Lady Sybil, "how are we to manage about an accompaniment? A single violin is no use out in the open. Would it be too dreadful if we had a harmonium concealed somewhere? We could get one from Inverness; and you know a harmonium would do very well for the music that introduces the visions."

"Mr. Moore," put in Miss Georgie Lestrangle, with a complaining air, "fancy their having given me another of Kitty Clive's characters: isn't it too bad! Why, I'll go on and on until I identify

myself with her altogether: and then, you know, Kitty Clive wasn't — I'm afraid she wasn't quite——”

“Oh, Mrs. Clive was all right; she was a great friend of Dr. Johnson,” Lionel made answer, to reassure the young lady.

“But I wish you girls would leave off chattering, and let Mr. Moore get something to eat,” the young matron said impatiently; and she herself was so kind as to go and fetch the claret-jug from the side-table and fill his glass.

However, there was peace in store for him. When he had finished with this late lunch, Lady Adela begged him to excuse them if they left him to shift for himself: they were busy dress-making, she said. Would she send for one of the keepers, who would show him one or two of the nearest pools, so that he might try for a salmon? The gentlemen had all gone down the strath, to test some new rifle, she thought: this was out of consideration for her, for she could not bear shooting close to the house: would he walk in that direction, and see what they were doing?

“Don't you trouble,” he said, instantly. “You leave me to myself. I like to wander about and find out my surroundings. I shall go down to the

river, to begin with: I saw some picturesque bits higher up when we were coming along."

"You'll almost certainly find Honnor Cunyng-ham there," said Miss Lestrangle. "I suppose she has gone storking as usual."

"Stalking?" said he, in some amazement.

"No, no—storking, as I call it. She haunts the side of the river like a crane or a heron," said the red-haired damsel. "I think she would rather land a salmon than go to heaven."

"Georgie," said the young matron, severely, "you are not likely ever to do either; so you needn't be spiteful. Come away and get to work. Mr. Moore, we dine at eight; and if you are anywhere up or down the strath, you'll hear the bell over the stables rung at seven, and then at half-past."

So they went off and left him; and he was not displeased; he passed out by the front door, lit a cigar, and strolled down towards the banks of the Aivron. It was a bright and sweet-aired afternoon; he was glad to be at the end of his journey; and this was a very charming, if somewhat lonely, stretch of country in which he now found himself. The wide river, the steep hillside beyond hanging in foliage, the valley narrowing in among rocks

and then leading away up to those far solitudes of moorland and heather broken only here and there by a single pine—all these features of the landscape seemed so clear and fine in colour; there was no intervening haze; everything was vivid and singularly distinct, and yet aerial and harmonious and retiring of hue. But of course it was the stream—with its glancing lights, its living change and motion, its murmuring, varying voice—that was the chief attraction; and he wandered on by the side of it, noting here and there the long rippling shallows where the sun struck golden on the sand beneath, watching the oily swirls of the deep black-brown pools as if at any moment he expected to see a salmon leap into the air, and not even uninterested in the calm eddies on the other side, where the smooth water mirrored the yellow-green bank and the bushes and the overhanging birch-trees. He sat down for a while, listening absently to this continuous, soothing murmur, perhaps thinking of the roar of the great city he had left. He was quite content to be alone; he did not even want Maurice Mangan to be discoursing to him—in those seasons of calm in which questions, long unanswered, perhaps never to be answered, will arise.

Then he rose and went on again, for from the high road along which he had driven he had caught a glimpse of a wilder part of the glen, where the river seemed to come tumbling down a rocky chasm, with some huge boulders in mid-channel; and even now he could hear the distant, muffled roar of the waters. But all of a sudden he stopped. Away along there, and keeping guard (like a stork, as Miss Georgie Lestrangle had suggested) above the pool that lay on this side of the double waterfall, was a young lady, her back turned towards him. So far as he could make out, she wasn't doing anything; a long fishing-rod, with the butt on the ground, she held idly in her right hand; while with her left hand she occasionally shaded her face and looked across towards the west—probably, as he imagined, she was waiting for some of those smooth-sailing clouds to come and obscure the too fierce light of the sun. He knew who she was; this must be Honnor Cunyng-ham, Lady Adela's sister-in-law; and of course he did not wish to intrude on the young lady's privacy; he would try to pass by behind her unobserved, though here the strath narrowed until it was almost a defile.

He was soon relieved from all anxiety. Sharper

eyes than his own had perceived him. The young lady wheeled round; glanced at him for a second; turned again; and then a thin, tall, old man, who had hitherto been invisible to him, rose from his concealment among the rocks close to her, and came along the river-bank. He was a very handsome old man, this superannuated keeper, with his keen, aquiline nose, his clear grey eyes, and frosted hair.

“Miss Honnor says will you hef a cast, Sir. There’s some clouds will be over soon.”

“Oh, no, thank you, I could not dream of interrupting her,” Lionel said: and then it occurred to him that he ought to go and thank the young lady herself for this frank invitation. “I—I’ll go along and tell her so.”

As he walked towards her he kept his eye, somewhat furtively, on her, though now she had turned her back again; and all he could make out was that she had a very elegant figure; that she was tall—though not so tall as her three sisters-in-law; and that her abundant brown hair was short and curly and kept close to her head almost like a boy’s. Were not her shoulders a trifle square-set for a woman?—but perhaps that appearance was owing to her costume, for she wore a Norfolk

jacket of grey homespun that looked as if it could afford a good defence against the weather. She was entirely grey, in fact; for her short-skirted dress was of the same material; and so also was the Tam o' Shanter, adorned with salmon flies, that she wore on her shapely head of golden-brown curls. Oh, yes, she looked sufficiently picturesque, standing there against the glow of the western skies, with the long salmon-rod in her right hand; but he was hardly prepared for what followed. The moment that she heard him draw near, she wheeled round and regarded him for a second—regarded him with a glance that rather bewildered him by reason of its transparent honesty and directness. The clear hazel eyes seemed to read him through and through, and yet not to be aware of their own boldness; and he did not know why he was so glad to hear that she had a soft and girlish voice as she said—

“You are Mr. Moore. I am Lady Adela's sister—of course you know. Won't you take my rod? There will be some shadow very soon, I think.”

“Oh, certainly not—certainly not,” said he. “But I should be delighted if you would let me stay and look on: it would interest me quite as much—every bit as much.”

"Oh, stay by all means," said she, turning to look at the western sky. "But I wish you would take my rod. What are they all about to let you come wandering out alone, on the first day of your arrival?"

"Oh, that's quite right," said he, cheerfully. "Lady Adela and the young ladies are all busy dress-making."

"Ye may be getting ready, Miss Honnor," old Robert interposed. "There'll be a cloud over the sun directly."

Thus admonished the tall young fisher-maiden stepped down by the side of a rock overhanging this wide black-swirling pool, and proceeded to get her tackle in order.

"You know I'll give you my rod whenever you like to take a turn," said she, addressing Lionel even as she was getting the fly on to the water. "But we can't afford to waste a moment of shadow. I have done nothing all day on account of the sunlight."

And now the welcome shade was over, and after a preliminary cast or two to get the line out she was sending her fly well across, and letting it drift quietly down the stream, to be recovered by a series of small and gentle jerks. Lionel was

supposed to be looking on at the fishing; but, when he dared, he was stealing covert glances at her; for this was one of the most striking faces he had seen for many a day. There was a curiously pronounced personality about her features, refined as they were; her lips were proud—and perhaps a little firmer than usual just now when she was wielding a seventeen-foot rod; her clear hazel eyes were absolutely fearless; and her broadly-marked and somewhat square eyebrows appeared to lend strength rather than gentleness to the intellectual forehead. Then the stateliness of her neck and the set of her head: she seemed to recall to him some proud warrior-maiden out of Scandinavian mythology—though she was dressed in simple homespun and had for her only henchman this quiet old Robert who, crouching down under a birch-tree, was watching every cast made by his mistress with the intensest interest. And at last Lionel was startled to hear the old man call out, but in an undertone—
“Ho!”

Honnor Cunyngham began coolly to pull in her line through the rings.

“What is it?” Lionel asked, in wonder.

“I rose a fish then, but he came short,” she

said, quietly. "We'll give him a rest. A pretty good one, wasn't he, Robert?"

"Ay, he wass that, Miss Honnor, a good fish. And ye did not touch him?"

"Not at all: he'll come again sure enough."

And then she turned to Lionel; and he was pleased to observe, as she went on to speak to him about her sisters-in-law and their various pursuits, that, proud as those lips were, a sort of grave good-humour seemed to be their habitual expression, and also that those transparently honest hazel eyes had a very attractive sunniness in them when she was amused.

"The dress-making," she said: "Of course you know what that is about. They are preparing another of those out-of-door performances. Oh, yes, they are very much in earnest," she went on, with a smile that lightened and sweetened the pronounced character of her face. "And you are to be entertained this time. They are not going to ask you to do anything. Last time, at Campden Hill, you took a principal part, didn't you?—but this time you are merely to be a guest—a spectator."

"And which are you to be, Miss Cunyngham?" he made bold to ask.

“I? Oh, they never ask me to join in those things,” she said, pleasantly enough. “The sacred fire has not descended on me. They say that I regard their performances as mere childish amusement; but I don’t really; it isn’t for a Philistine like myself to express disdain about anything. But then, you see, if I were to try to join in with my clever sisters, and perhaps when they were most in earnest, I might laugh; and enthusiasts couldn’t be expected to like that, could they?”

She spoke very honestly and fairly, he thought, and without showing anything like scorn of what she did not sympathise with; and yet somehow he felt glad that he was not expected to take a part in this new masque.

“From what I remember of it,” said he, “I suppose it will be mostly a pageant—there is plenty of patriotic sentiment in it, but hardly any action, as far as I recollect. Of course, I know it chiefly because the poet Thomson wrote it, or partly wrote it, and because he put ‘Rule Britannia’ into it. Isn’t it odd,” he added, with a touch of adroit flattery (as he considered) “that the two chief national songs of England, ‘Ye Mariners of England’ and ‘Rule Britannia’ should both have been written by Scotchmen?”

She paid no heed to this compliment: indeed he might have known that the old Scotch families (many of them of Norman origin, by the way) have so intermarried with English families that they have very little distinct nationality, though they may be proud enough of their name. This young lady was no more Scotch than himself.

“I will try him again now,” said she, with a glance at the water; and forthwith she set to work with rod and line, beginning a few yards further up the stream, and gradually working down to where she had risen the fish. As she came near the spot, Lionel could see that she was covering every inch of the water with the greatest care, and also that at the end of each cast she let the fly hang for a time in the current. He became quite anxious himself. Was she not quite close to the fish now? Or had he caught too clear a glimpse of the fly on the previous occasion, and gone away? Yes, she must be almost over him now; and yet there was no sign. Or past him? Or he might have turned and gone a yard or two further down? Then, as this eagerly interested spectator was intently watching the swirls of the deep pool, there was a sudden wave on the surface, she struck up her rod slightly, and the next moment away went

her line tearing through the water, while the reel screamed out its joyous note of recognition. Old Robert jumped to his feet. At the same instant the fish made another appalling rush, far away on the opposite side of the river, and at the end of it flashed into the air—a swift gleam of purple-blue and silver that revealed his splendid size. Lionel was quite breathless with excitement. He dared not speak to her, for fear of distracting her attention. But she was apparently quite calm; and old Robert looked on without any great solicitude, as if he knew that his young mistress needed neither advice nor assistance. Meanwhile the salmon had come back into the middle of the stream, where it lay deep, only giving evidence of its existence by a series of vicious tugs.

“I don’t like that tugging, Robert,” she said. “He knows too much. He has pulled himself free from a fly before.”

“Ay, ay, I’m afraid of that too,” old Robert said, with his keen eyes fixed on every movement of the straining line.

Then the fish lay still and sulked; and she took the opportunity of moving a little bit up-stream, and reeling in a yard or two.

"Would you like to take the rod now, Mr. Moore?" she said generously.

"Oh, certainly not," he exclaimed. "I would not for worlds you should lose the salmon—and do you think I could take the responsibility?"

He ceased speaking, for he saw that her attention had once more been drawn to the salmon, which was now calmly and steadily making up stream. He watched the slow progress of the line; and then to his horror he perceived that the fish was heading for the other side of a large grey rock that stood in mid-channel. If he should persist in boring his way up that further current, would not he inevitably cut the line on the rock? What could she do? Still nearer and nearer to the big boulder went that white line, steadily cutting through the brown water; and still she said not a word, though Lionel fancied she was now putting on a heavier strain. At last the line was almost touching the stone; and there the salmon lay motionless. He was within half a yard of certain freedom, if only he had known; for the water was far too deep to allow of old Robert wading in and getting the line over the rock. But just as Lionel, far more excited than the fisher-maiden herself, was wondering what was

going to happen next, the whole situation of affairs was reversed in a twinkling; the salmon suddenly turned and dashed away down-stream until it was right at the end of the pool, and there, in deep water on the other side, it resumed its determined tugging, so that the pliant top of the rod was shaken as if by a human hand.

“That is what frightens me,” she said to Lionel. “I don’t like that at all.”

But what could he do to help her? Eager wishes were of no avail; and yet he felt as if the crowning joy of his life would be to see that splendid big fish safely out here on the bank. All his faculties seemed to be absorbed in the contemplation of this momentous struggle. The past and the future were alike cut off from him—he had forgotten all about the theatre and its trumpery applause—he had no thought but for the unseen creature underneath the water that was dashing its head from side to side, and then boring down, and then sailing away over to the opposite shallows, exhausting every manœuvre to regain its liberty. He could not speak to her: what was anything he could say as compared with the tremendous importance of the next movement on the part of the fish? But she was calm enough.

“He doesn’t tire himself much, Robert,” she said. “He keeps all his strength for that tugging.”

But just as she spoke the salmon began to come into mid-stream again, and she stepped a yard or two back, reeling in the line swiftly. Once or twice she looked at the top of the rod: there was a faint strain on, nothing more. Then her enemy seemed inclined to yield a little; she reeled in still more quickly; knot after knot of the casting-line gradually rose from the surface; at last they caught sight of a dull bronze gleam—the sunlight striking through the brown water on the side of the fish. But he had no intention of giving in yet; he had only come up to look about him. Presently he headed up-stream again—quietly and steadily; then there was another savage shaking of his head and tugging; then a sharp run and plunge; and again he lay deep, jerking to get this unholy thing out of his jaw. Lionel began to wonder that any one should voluntarily and for the sake of amusement undergo this frightful anxiety. He knew that if he had possession of the rod, his hands would be trembling; his breath would be coming short and quick; that a lifetime of hope and fear would be crowded into every minute. And yet here was this girl watching coolly and critically the motion of

the line, and showing not the slightest trace of excitement on her finely-cut, impressive features. But he noticed that her lips were firm : perhaps she was nerving herself not to betray any concern.

“I think I am getting the better of him, Robert,” said she, presently, as the fish began to steer a little in her direction.

“I would step back a bit, Miss Honnor,” the keen-visaged old gillie said ; but he did not step back ; on the contrary, he crouched down by the side of a big boulder, close to the water, and again he tried his gaff, to make sure that the steel clip was firmly fixed in the handle.

Yes, there was no doubt that the salmon was beaten. He kept coming nearer and nearer to the land, led by the gentle, continuous strain of the pliant top ; though ever and anon he would vainly try to head away again into deep water. It was a beautiful thing to look at : this huge gleaming creature taken captive by an almost invisible line, and gradually yielding to inevitable fate. Joy was in Lionel’s heart. If he had wondered that any one, for the sake of amusement, should choose to undergo such agonies of anxiety, he wondered no more. Here was the fierce delight of triumph. The struggle of force against skill was about over ;

there was no more tugging now ; there were no more frantic rushes, or bewildering leaps in the air. Slowly, slowly the great fish was being led in to shore. Twice had old Robert warily stretched out his gaff, only to find that the prize was not yet within his reach. And then, just as the young lady with the firm-set lips said ‘Now, Robert!’ and just as the gaff was cautiously extended for the third time, the salmon gave a final lurch forward, and the next instant—before Lionel could tell what had happened—the fly was dangling helplessly in the air, and the fish was gone.

“*Au Yeea!*” said Robert in an undertone to himself; while Lionel, as soon as he perceived the extent of the catastrophe, felt as though some black horror had fallen over the world. He could not say a word ; he seemed yearning to have the fish for one second again where he had lately seen it—and then wouldn’t he have gladly jumped into the stream, gaff in hand, to secure the splendid trophy ! But now—now there was nothing but emptiness, and a lifeless waste of hurrying water.

And as regards the young lady ? Well, she smiled—in a disconcerted way, to be sure ; and then she said, with apparent resignation—

“I almost expected it. I never do hope to get a

tugging salmon ; all the way through I was saying to myself we shouldn't land him. However, there's no use fretting over lost fish. We did our best, Robert, didn't we ? ”

“ Indeed you could not hef done better, Miss Honnor,” said the old gillie. “ There wass no mistake that you made at ahl.”

“ Very well,” said she, cheerfully ; and she looked in a kindly way towards the old man. “ I did everything right ; and as for you, no one will tell me that the best gillie in Ross-shire did anything wrong ; so we have nothing to reproach ourselves with, Robert, have we ? ”

“ But it is such a dreadful misfortune ! ” exclaimed Lionel, who could hardly understand this equanimity. “ Another couple of seconds and you must have had him.”

“ Well, now, Robert,” said she, briskly, “ shall we go up and try the tail of the Long Pool ? Or go down to the Stones ? ”

“ We'll chist go up to the tail of the Long Pool, Miss Honnor,” said he ; and he took the rod from her, picked up her waterproof, and set out ; while Lionel, without waiting for any further invitation, accompanied her.

And as they walked along, picking their way

among boulders and bracken and heather, he was asking her whether the heart-breaking accidents and bitter disappointments of salmon-fishing were not greater than its rewards; as to which she lightly made answer—

“You must come and try. None of the gentlemen here are very eager anglers; I suppose they get enough of salmon-fishing in the spring. Now if you care about it at all, one rod is always enough for two people; and we could arrange it this way—that you should take the pools where wading is necessary. They’ll get a pair of waders for you at the lodge. At present old Robert does all the wading that is wanted; but of course I don’t care much about playing a fish that has been hooked by somebody else. Now you would take the wading pools.”

“Oh, thank you,” said he, “but I’m afraid I should show myself such a duffer. I used to be a pretty fair trout-fisher when I was a lad,” he went on to say; and then it suddenly occurred to him that the offer of her companionship ought not to be received in this hesitating fashion. “But I shall be delighted to try my hand, if you will let me; and of course you must see that I don’t disturb the best pools.”

So they passed up through the narrow gorge, where the heavy volume of water was dashing down in tawny masses between the rocks, and got into the open country again, where the strath broadened out in a wide expanse of moorland. Here the river ran smooth between low banks, bordered now and again by a fringe of birch; and there was a greater quiet prevailing, the further and further they got away from the tumbling torrents below. But when they reached the Long Pool no fishing was possible; the afternoon sun struck full on the calm surface of the water; there was not a breath of wind to stir the smooth-mirrored blue and white; they could do nothing but choose out a heathery knoll on the bank, and sit down and wait patiently for a passing cloud.

“I suppose,” said she, clasping her fingers together in her lap, “I suppose you are all eagerness about to-morrow morning?”

“Oh, I am not going shooting to-morrow,” said he.

“What!” she exclaimed. “To be on a grouse-moor on the Twelfth, and not go out?”

“It is because it is the Twelfth: I don’t want to spoil sport,” said he, modestly. “And I don’t want to make a fool of myself either. If I could

shoot well enough, and if there was a place for me, I should be glad to go out with them; but my shooting is like my fishing, a relic of boyhood's days; and I should not like to make an exhibition of myself before a lot of crack shots."

"That is only false pride," said she, in her curiously direct, straightforward way. "Why should you be ashamed to admit that there are certain things you can't do as well as you can do certain other things? There is no particular virtue in having been brought up to the use of a gun or rod. Take your own case. You are at home on the stage. There you know everything—you are the master, the proficient. But take the crack shots and put them on the stage, and ask them to do the simplest thing—then it is their turn to be helpless, not to say ridiculous."

"Perhaps," said he, rather tentatively, "you mean that we should all of us keep to our own walks in life?"

"I am sure I don't mean anything of the kind," said she, with much frankness. "I only mean that if you are not a first-rate shot, you need not be ashamed of it: you should remember there are other things you can do well. And really you must go out to-morrow morning. My brother was

talking about it at breakfast; and I believe the proposal is that you go with him and Captain Waveney. If any little mistake is made, Captain Waveney is the man to retrieve it—at least so I've heard them say."

"At all events," said he, "if I go with them at all, it will not be under false pretences. I shall warn them, to begin with, that I am a bad shot; then I can't be found out. And they must put me in a position where I can't do much harm."

"I dare say you shoot very well," she said, with a smile. "Gentlemen always talk like that on the evening before the Twelfth, if they have come to a strange moor."

But now she had risen again, for a breath of wind was stirring along the strath, while some higher air-currents were slowly bringing certain fleecy clouds across from the west. As soon as the welcome shade had stolen over the river, she began to cast; and on this smooth water he could see more clearly what an excellent line this was that she sent out. Not a long line—perhaps twenty-three or twenty-four yards—but thrown most admirably, the fly lighting on the surface like a snowflake. Moreover, he was now a little bit behind her, so that he could with impunity

regard the appearance of this newly-found companion—her lithe and agile form, the proud set of her neck and head, the beautiful close masses of her curly golden-brown hair, and the fine contour of her sun-tanned cheek. Then the vigorous exercise in which she was engaged revealed all the suppleness and harmonious proportions of her figure; for here was no pretty wrist-work of trout-fishing, but the wielding of a double-handed salmon-rod; and she had taught herself the gillies' method of casting—that is to say, she made the backward cast by throwing both arms right up in the air, so that, as she paused to let the line straighten out behind, her one hand was on a level with her forehead, and the other more than a foot above that. Lionel thought that before he tried casting in the presence of Miss Honnor Cunyng-ham, he should like to get a few quiet lessons from old Robert.

However, all this expenditure of skill proved to be of no avail. She could not move a fin; nor had Robert any better luck, when, they having come to a shallow reach, she allowed the old man, who was encased in waders, to get into the water and fish along the opposite bank. When he came ashore again, his young mistress said—

“ Dame Fortune hasn’t forgiven us for letting that first one go.”

And old Robert, who had probably never heard of Dame Fortune (or may have considered the phrase a polite and young-lady-like form of swearing), merely made answer—

“ Ay, Miss Honnor, we’ll go and try the Small Pool, now.”

The Small Pool lies between the Long Pool and the Rock Pool ; it is a circular deep black hole, in which the waters collect before dashing and roaring down between the great grey boulders ; and to fish it you must get out on certain knife-like ledges that seem to offer anything but a secure foothold. However, Miss Honnor did not think twice about it ; and indeed as she made her way out on those narrow slips of rock, Lionel perceived that her boots, which were laced in front like men’s boots, if they were small enough as regarded that portion covering the foot, were provided with most sensibly wide soles, which again were studded with nails. And there, balancing herself as best she might, she got out a short line, and began industriously to cover every inch of the surging and whirling water. A most likely-looking place, Lionel thought to himself, as he sate and looked on. But here

also they were doomed to disappointment. It is true she hooked a small sea-trout—and was heartily glad when it shook itself free, thereby saving her time and trouble. All the rest of her labour was expended for nothing: so finally she had to reel up and make her way ashore, where she surrendered her rod to the old gillie.

Then they passed down through the narrow defile again, and came in view of the wide strath—now all saffron-tinted in the evening sunlight—with the lodge and its straggling dependencies in the midst of the plain. Perhaps it was this sight of the house that recalled to her what they had been talking of some time before; for as they walked along the river-bank she was again urging him to go out on the following morning; and not only that but she declared that he must have one or two days' deer-stalking while he was in the north. If he missed, then he missed: why should he care what foresters and gillies thought of him? Of course he was very grateful to her for all her kind patronage; but he could not help thinking it rather odd to find a woman lending courage to a man—counselling him to be independent, and to have no fear of ridicule.

“I recollect,” he said to her, “once hearing

Lord Rockminster say that until a man has gone deer-stalking he can have no idea what extremes of misery a human being is capable of enduring."

"Lord Rockminster is incurably lazy," she said. "I think if you found yourself riding along this strath some night about eight or nine o'clock, knowing that away up among the hills you had left a stag of ten or twelve points to be sent for and brought down the next morning—then I think you wouldn't be reflecting on the discomforts you had gone through, or, if you did, it would be with pride. Why," said she, "you surely didn't come to the Highlands to play at private theatricals?"

"I get enough of the theatre in the south," he said, "as you may well imagine."

But here was a bend of the river sheltered from the weltering sun by a steep and wooded hill; and Miss Cunyngham, at old Robert's suggestion, began work again. It was really most interesting to watch this graceful casting; Lionel, sitting down on the heather, and smoking a cigarette, seemed to want no other occupation; he forgot what the object of throwing a fly was, the throwing of the fly seemed to be enough in itself. He had grown to think that all these oily sweeps of brown water, touched here and there by dark

olive-green reflections, were useful only as showing where the fly dropped; there was no fish watching the slow jerking of the "Bishop" across the current; the one salmon that haunted the Rock Pool had put in an appearance and gone away long ago. But suddenly there was a short, sharp scream of the reel: then silence.

"What is it, Robert?" she said—apparently holding on to something. "Another sea-trout?"

"Oh, no, Miss Honnor, I am not thinking that——"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when it became abundantly clear that the unknown creature in the deeps had not the least intention of concealing his identity. A sudden rush downstream, followed by a wild splashing and thrashing on the surface, was only the first of a series of performances that left Miss Honnor not a single moment of breathing space. Either she was following him rapidly down the river, or following him up again, or reeling in swiftly as he came sailing towards her, or again she could only stand in breathless suspense as he flung himself into the air, and then beat and churned the water, shaking the line this way and that.

"Oh, you wicked little wretch!" she cried, at

a particularly vicious flourish out of the water; but this was the kind of fish she liked; this was a fish that fought fair—a gentlemanly fish, without the thought of a sulk in him—a very Prince Rupert even among grilse; this was no malevolent, underhand, deep-boring tugger. Indeed these brilliant dashes and runs and summersaults soon began to tell. The gallant little grilse was plainly getting the worst of it. He allowed himself to be led; but whenever she stepped back on the bank, and tried to induce him to come in, at the first appearance of shallow water he would instantly sheer off again with all the strength that was left in him. Fortunately he seemed inclined to head up-stream; and she humoured him in that, for there the water was deeper under the bank. Even then he fought splendidly to the last. As soon as he got to recognise that an enemy was waiting for him—an enemy armed with some white shining thing that he more than once warily slipped out—he would make struggle after struggle to keep away—until at last there was a sudden, swift, decisive stroke of the steel clip, and Robert had his glittering prize safely ashore.

“What o’clock is it, Mr. Moore?” said Miss

Honour—but she seemed pleased with the result of this brisk encounter.

He looked at his watch.

“Half-past seven,” he said.

“Yes; I thought I heard the first bell: we must make haste home. Not but that my sisters are very good to me,” she continued, as she took the fly that Robert handed her and stuck it in her Tam o’ Shanter, “if I happen to have got hold of a fish: I am allowed to come into dinner anyhow. And then, you know, there is no great ceremony at this bungalow of a place: it’s different at the Braes, if Lady Adela happens to have a large house-party—then I have to behave like other folk. What do you say, Robert—seven pounds? Well, he made a good fight of it. And I’m glad not to be going home empty-handed.”

So Lionel picked up her waterproof and put it over his arm; she shouldered her fishing-rod after having reeled in the line; the handsome old gillie brought up the rear with the gaff and the slung grilse; and thus equipped the three of them set out for the lodge—across the wide valley that was now all russet and golden under the warm light still lingering in the evening skies.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWELFTH.

WHEN Lionel went down early next morning, he found Lady Adela's father in sole possession; and was not long in discovering that the old Earl was in a towering rage.

"Good-morning!" said this tall, pale, stooping-shouldered old gentleman, whose quite hairless face was surmounted by a brown wig. "Well, what do you think of last night's performance? What do you think of it? Did you ever know of any such gross outrage on common decency? Why, God bless my soul and body, I never heard of such a thing!"

Lionel knew quite well what he meant. The fact was that a Free Church Minister whom Sir Hugh Cunyngham had met somewhere had called at Aivron Lodge; as the custom of that part of the country is, he was invited to stay to dinner;

he sate late, told many stories, and drank a good deal of whisky, until it was not judged prudent to let him try to get his pony across the ford, even if hospitality had not demanded that he should be offered a room for the night; and then, when every one was thinking of getting away to bed, the worthy man must needs insist on having family worship, to which the servants had also to be summoned. It was the inordinate length of this service at such a time of night that had driven old Lord Fareborough to the verge of madness.

“Look at me!” he said to Lionel in tones of deep and bitter indignation. “Look at me—a skeleton—a wreck of a human being who can only get along by the most careful nursing of his nervous system. My heart is affected; I have serious doubts about the state of my lungs; it is only through the most assiduous nursing of my nerves that I exist at all. And what is more maddening than enforced restraint—imprisonment—no chance of leaving the room with all those strange servants at the door: why, God bless my soul, I call it an outrage! I yield to no one in respect for the cloth, whether it is worn by a Presbyterian, or a Catholic, or one of my own Church; but I say that no one has a right to

thrust religious services down my throat! What the devil did Cunyngham mean by asking him to stay to dinner at all?"

"As I understand it," said Lionel, with a becoming diffidence, "it was some suggestion of Captain Waveney's. He said the Free Church ministers were particular friends of the crofters—and of course the goodwill of the crofters is of importance to a shooting-tenant——"

"The goodwill of the crofters!" the bewigged old nobleman broke in, impatiently. "Are you aware, sir, that the Strathaivron Branch of the Land League met last week and passed a resolution declaring salmon to be ground-game? What are you to do with people like that? How are you to reason with them? What is the use of pacifying them? They are in the hands of violent and malevolent revolutionaries—it is war they want—it is 1789 they want—it is plunder and robbery and confiscation they want—and the right of every man to live idle at the cost of the state! Why, God bless my soul, the idea that you are to try to pacify these ignorant savages——"

But here Lionel, who began to fancy that he had discovered another Octavius Quirk, was afforded relief; for the Minister himself appeared; and at

the very sight of him Lord Fareborough indignantly quitted the room. The Minister, who was a rather irascible-looking little man with a weather-reddened face and rusty whiskers, inquired of Lionel whether it was possible to procure a glass of milk; but when Lionel rang the bell and had some brought for him, the Minister observed that milk by itself was a dangerous thing in the morning; whereupon the butler had to be sent for, who produced the spirit-decanter; and then, and finally, the Minister, boldly discarding the milk altogether, poured out for himself a good solid dram, and drank it off with much evident satisfaction.

Now the ladies began to make their appearance, some of them going along to the gun-room to hear what the head-keeper had to say, others of them trooping out by the front door to guess at the weather. Among the latter was Miss Honnor Cunyngham; and Lionel, who had followed her, went up to her.

“A beautiful morning, isn’t it?” he said.

“I’m afraid it’s too beautiful,” said she in reply.

“Look up there.”

And she was right. This was far too picturesque and vivid a morning to portend well for a shooting-

day. Down at the further end of the strath, the skies were banked up with dark and heavy clouds ; the lake-like sweep of the river was of a sombre and livid blue ; and between the indigo stream and the purple skies, a long neck of land, catching the sunlight, burned the most brilliant gold. And even as they stood and looked, a faint grey veil gradually interposed between them and the distant landscape ; a rainbow slowly formed, spanning the broad valley ; and then behind the fairy curtain of the shower they could see the yellow river-banks, and the birch woods, and the farther-stretching hills all vaguely and spectrally shining in the sun.

“But this is a very peculiar glen,” said she. “It often threatens like that when it means nothing. You may get a perfectly dry, still day after all. And Mr. Moore, may I ask you if what you said about your shooting yesterday afternoon was entirely true, or only a bit of modesty ?”

“If it comes to that,” he said, “I never shot a grouse in my life—no, nor ever shot *at* one.”

“Because,” she continued, with a certain hesitation which was indeed far removed from her usual manner, “because you—you seem rather sensitive to criticism—to other people’s opinion—and if you wouldn’t think it impertinent of me

to offer you some hints—well, for what they are worth——”

“But I should be immensely grateful!” he answered at once.

“Well,” she said, in an undertone, so that no one should overhear, “you know, on the Twelfth, with such still weather as we have had for the last week or two, the birds are never wild; you needn’t be in the least anxious; you won’t be called upon for snap-shots at all; you can afford to take plenty of time and get well on to the birds before you fire. You see, you will be in the middle; you will take any bird that gets up in front of you; my brother and Captain Waveney will take the outside ones and the awkward cross shots. And if a covey gets up all at once, they won’t expect you to pick out the old cock first; they’ll do all that; in fact, you must put yourself at your ease, and not be anxious, and everything will be right——”

“Honor!” called Lady Adela. “Come away at once—breakfast is in.” So that Lionel had no proper opportunity of thanking the young lady for her friendly counsel and the interest she took in his small affairs.

Breakfast was a merry meal; for as soon as the things had been brought in, the servants were

allowed to leave; and while Lady Adela poured out the tea and coffee, the gentlemen carved for themselves at the sideboard or handed round the dishes at table. The Rev. Mr. MacNachten, the little Free Church Minister, was especially vivacious and humorous, abounding with facetious anecdotes and jests and personal reminiscences; until, observing that breakfast was over, he composed his countenance, and proceeded to return thanks. The grace (in spite of Lord Fareborough's nervous qualms) was comparatively a short one; and at the end of it they all rose and were for going their several ways.

But this was not to the Minister's mind.

"Your leddyship," said he, addressing his hostess in impressive tones, "it would be ill done of us to be assembled on such an occasion without endeavouring to make profitable use of it. I propose to say a few words in season, if ye will have the kindness to call in the servants."

Lady Adela glanced towards her husband with some apprehension on her face (for she knew the importance attached to the morning of the Twelfth), but whatever Sir Hugh may have thought he made no sign. Accordingly there was nothing for it but that she should ring the bell and summon the

whole household; and in a few minutes the door of the room was surrounded by a group of Highland women-servants and gillies, the English servants rather hanging back in the hall. The breakfast-party had resumed their seats; but the Minister remained standing; and presently, when perfect silence had been secured, he lifted up his voice in prayer.

Well, it was a sufficiently earnest prayer; and it was listened to with profound attention by the smart-looking lasses and tall and swarthy gillies clustering about the door; but to the English part of his audience its chief features were its curiously exhortatory and argumentative character and also its interminable length. As the Minister went on and on, the frown of impatience on Lord Fareborough's face deepened and deepened; he fretted and fumed and fidgeted; but of course he could not bring disgrace on his son-in-law's house by rising and leaving the room. Nor did it convey much consolation to the sportsmen to hear the heavy tramp of the head-keeper just outside the windows; for they knew that Roderick must be making use of the most frightful language over this unheard-of delay.

But at last the tremendous oration—for it was

far more of an oration than a prayer—came to an end ; and the congregation drew a long breath and were about to seize their newly-found liberty when the Minister quietly remarked—

“ We will now sing the Hundred and Twenty-First Psalm.”

“ God bless my soul ! ” exclaimed Lord Fareborough, aloud ; and Lady Adela flushed quickly ; for it was not seemly of her father to give way to such anger before those keen-eyed and keen-eared Highland servants.

However, the Rev. Mr. MacNachten took no heed. He began to sing, in a slow and raucous fashion, and to the melancholy tune of *Ballerma*—

*I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid ;*

and presently there came from the door a curious nasal wail, men and women singing in unison, and seemingly afraid to trust their voices. As for the people in the room no one tried to join in this part of the service—no one except Honnor Cunyngham, who appeared to know the words of the Psalm and the music equally well, for she accompanied the Minister throughout, singing boldly and simply and without shyness, her clear voice making marked contrast with his raven notes. Nor was

this all ; for when the Psalm was finished, the Minister said——

“ My friends, when it hath pleased the Lord that we should meet together, we should commune one with another, to the perfecting of ourselves for that greater assemblage to which I hope we are all bound.” And then, without further preface, he proceeded to exhort them to well-doing in all the duties of life—as masters and mistresses, as servants, as parents, as children, as brothers, as fellow-Christians ; while at the end of each rambling and emphatic passage there came in a verse from Ecclesiastes : “ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter : Fear God, and keep His Commandments : for this is the whole duty of man.”

Alas ! there was no conclusion to this matter. The little violent-faced Minister warmed to his work, insomuch that several times he used a Gaelic phrase the better to impress those patient listeners at the door, while he paid less and less attention to the congregation in the room. Indeed the hopeless resignation that had at first settled down on some of their faces had given place to a most obvious resentment ; but what did that matter to Mr. MacNachten, who was not looking

their way? Again and again Sir Hugh Cunyngham forlornly pulled out his watch; but the hint was not taken. Lord Fareborough was beside himself with unrest; he drummed his fingers on the tablecloth; he crossed one leg, and then the other; while more than once he made a noise between his tongue and his teeth which fortunately could not be heard far amid the rolling periods of the sermon. Captain Waveney, who was master of the ceremonies in all that concerned the shooting—even as he was Sir Hugh's right hand man in the matter of cattle-breeding at the Braes—on several occasions, when a momentary pause occurred, jumped to his feet as if on the assumption that the discourse was finished; but this *ruse* was quite ineffectual; for the preacher took no notice of him. And meanwhile the huge figure of Roderick Munro could be seen marching up and down outside the windows, while a pair of wrathful eyes glared in from time to time; and Lady Adela, noticing these baleful glances, began to hope that the irate head-keeper would not secretly instruct a gillie to go and throw the Minister into the river as he was crossing the ford on his way home.

“May God forgive the scoundrel!” cried Lord Fareborough, when, the sermon at long length

being over and the small crowd allowed to disperse, he was free to hasten along to the gun-room to get his boots. "And I am expected to shoot after having my nerves tortured like this! Who are going with me? Rockminster and Lestrangle?—Well, they must understand that I will not be hurried and flurried—I say I will not be hurried and flurried—I don't want to fall down dead—my heart won't recover this morning's work for months to come! God bless my soul, who asked that insolent scoundrel to stay the night! And what's that, Waveney—the ladies coming out to lunch? The ladies coming out to lunch on the Twelfth—and the day half over: they must be out of their senses!"

"That is the arrangement," Captain Waveney said, with rather a rueful laugh, as he, too, was lacing up his boots. "Lady Rosamund is going to take a sketch of the luncheon-party."

"Let her take a sketch of the devil!" said this very angry and inconsiderate papa. "Why can't she do it some other day?—why the Twelfth?—Good heavens, is everything conspiring to vex and annoy me so that I shan't be able to hit a haystack?"

"Sir Hugh never says no to anything that Lady

Rosamund asks," observed Captain Waveney, with much good-humour.

"Sir Hugh be ——" And here Lord Fareborough expressed a wish about his son-in-law and host that was probably only a figure of speech.

"Well, I don't know about that," the other replied complacently, as he went to the couch and removed the cloth laid over the guns to protect them from the fine peat-dust (for a huge peat-fire burned continuously in this great gun-room, for the drying of garments brought home wet from the shooting or fishing). "I don't know about that; but at present the arrangement is that we lunch at the top of the Bad Step; and I believe that Miss Cunyngham is coming back from the Junction Pool, so that Lady Rosamund may have her sketch complete."

Indeed, this untoward incident of the Minister's misplaced zeal seemed to throw a certain gloom over the small party to which Lionel soon found himself attached, as it moved away from the house. The tall, brown-bearded head-keeper was in a sullen rage, though he could only reveal his wrath in sharp little sentences of discontent. Sir Hugh had also been put out at losing the best part of the morning; and Captain Waveney, who was a

dapper little man, full of brisk spirits, did not care to talk to silent persons. As for Lionel, he was certainly very nervous and anxious; but none the less resolved to remember and act upon Honnor Cunyngham's advice. The tail of the procession was brought up by a gillie leading, or rather holding in, two brace of remarkably handsome Gordon setters, and another gillie in charge of a patient-eyed pony with a couple of panniers slung over its back.

However, the busy work of the day soon banished these idle regrets. When they had climbed a bit of the hill-side, and passed through a gate in a rude stone wall, they stopped for a second to put cartridges in their guns; the keeper had two of the dogs uncoupled; while the gillie, putting a strap on the coupling of the other two, led them away to a convenient knoll, where he lay down, the gillie with the pony following his example. And scarcely had the two dogs began to work this open bit of moorland when one of them suddenly ceased its wide ranging—suddenly as if it had been turned to stone; and then slowly, slowly it began to draw forward, its companion, a younger dog, backing beautifully, and looking on with startled, watchful eyes. It was an anxious moment

for the famous young baritone of the New Theatre ; for the dog was right in front of him ; and as the three guns, in line, stealthily moved forward, he made sure that this bird was going to get up just before him. Despite all his resolve to be perfectly cool and calm, his heart was beating quickly ; and again and again he was repeating to himself Honnor Cunyngham's counsel—and wondering whether he would disgrace himself at the very outset—when some bewildering brown thing sprang from the ground—there was a terrific *whirr*—a crack ! from Captain Waveney's gun—and away along there the grouse came tumbling down into the heather. Almost at the same moment there was another appalling *whirr* on his right—followed by a bang from Sir Hugh's gun—and another bird fell headlong. After the briefest pause for reloading, the setter, that had obediently dropped at the first shot, was encouraged to go forward, the guns warily following. But it turned out that this had been an outlying brace of birds ; the dogs were soon ranging freely again ; Roderick picked up the slain grouse ; and the whole party went on.

“ Sorry you didn't get the first shot, Mr. Moore,” said Sir Hugh—who was a short, thick-set man,

with a fresh-coloured face, iron-grey hair, and keen, light-blue eyes.

“I wish the birds would all rise to you two,” Lionel said. “Then I shouldn’t have to pitch into myself for missing.”

“Oh, you’ll soon get into the way of it,” Sir Hugh said, good-naturedly. “There’s never much doing along this face.”

“I’ll bet Bruce is on to something,” Captain Waveney exclaimed, suddenly. In fact only one of the ranging setters was now in sight; and Roderick had quickly ran up to the top of a heathery knoll, to have them both in view. At the same moment they saw him hold up his arm to warn the inattentive Venus.

“How, Venus! How, Venus!” he called in a low voice; and immediately the dog, observing that its companion was drawing on to a point, became rigid.

The guns were on the scene directly; and they were just in time; for with a simultaneous rattle of wings that seemed to fill the air, a small covey of birds sprang from the heather and appeared to vanish into space. At least Lionel saw nothing of the others; his attention was concentrated on one that seemed to be flying away in a straight line

from him; and after pausing for half a second (during which he was calling on himself to be cool) he pulled the trigger. To his inexpressible satisfaction the bird stopped in mid-air and came down with a thump on the heather, where it gave but one flutter and then lay still. He turned to see what his companions had done with their brisk fusillade. But he could not make out. They were still watching the setter, that was again being encouraged to go on, lest a stray bird or two might still be in hiding. However, the quest was fruitless. The whole of the small covey had risen simultaneously. So Roderick picked up the dead birds, and put them on a conspicuous stone, at the same time signalling to the gillie with the pony, who was slowly coming up. Then the shooting party went forward again.

“How many birds rose then?” Lionel asked of his host.

“Five.”

“And you got them all?” he said, judging by what he had seen the head-keeper pick up.

“Oh, yes, we got them all. They spread out like a fan. Waveney got one brace, and I another. I suppose,” he added, with a smile, “you were too intent on your own bird to notice?”

“Yes, I was,” he said, honestly; but he was none the less elated; for he knew that a good beginning would give him confidence.

And it did. They were soon at a part of the moor where the fun grew fast and furious; and keeping as close as he could to certainties, or what looked like certainties, he was doing very fairly well. As for the other two, he could only judge of their prowess by the birds the keeper picked up; for he kept strictly to his own business; and rarely adventured on a second shot. But it was clear that both Sir Hugh and Captain Waveney were highly pleased by the way things were going. There were plenty of birds; they lay well; the dogs were working beautifully; and the bag was mounting up at a rate that promised to atone for the delay of the morning. In fact they were now disposed to regard that episode as rather a comical affair.

“I say, Waveney,” Sir Hugh remarked, as they paused for a moment to have a sip of cold tea, for the day was hot, “you’d better confess it: you put up the old Minister to give us that frightfully long service this morning. It was a joke on Lord Fareborough—now, wasn’t it?”

“It may have been; but I had nothing to do

with it anyway," was the answer. "Not I. Too serious a joke. I thought his lordship was going to have a fit of apoplexy when he came into the gun-room."

"My good fellow, don't talk like that!" the other exclaimed. "If you mention apoplexy to him, he'll add that on to the hundred-and-twenty diseases and dangers that threaten his life every moment. Apoplexy? What has he got already?—gout, asthma, heart disease, his lungs giving way, his liver in a frightful condition, his nervous system gone to bits—and yet all the same the old hypocrite is going to try for a stag before he leaves. I suppose he'll want Roderick to carry him as soon as he quits the pony! Well, come along, Mr. Moore: we've done pretty well so far, I think."

But it was not Lionel who needed any incitement to go forward; he was far more eager than any of his companions, now that he had been acquitting himself none so ill. Moreover, he had youth on his side, and a sound chest, while nature had not given him a pair of well-formed calves for nothing; so that he faced the steep hill-sides or got over the rough ground with comparative ease, rejoicing the while in the unwonted freedom of

knickerbockers. It was Sir Hugh, with his bulky habit of body, who got blown now and again : as for Captain Waveney, he was a pretty tough subject and wiry. So they fought bravely on, to atone for the inhuman detention of the morning ; and by the time it was necessary to make for the appointed luncheon-rendezvous they had the wherewithal to give a very excellent account of themselves.

Now several times during the morning they had come in view of the Aivron, winding far below them through the wide strath, or narrowing to a thread as it rose towards the high horizon-line in the west ; and always, when there was a momentary chance, Lionel's eye had sought those distant sweeps and bends for some glimpse of the lonely angler-maiden, and sought in vain. The long valley seemed empty ; and some little feeling of shyness prevented his asking his companions to point out the Junction Pool, whither, as he understood, she had been bound in the morning. And as they now approached the appointed place of meeting, he was quite disturbed by the fancy that she might have strayed away into unknown regions, and be absent from this general pic-nic ; and the moment they came in sight of the group of people

who were strolling about, or looking on while the servants spread out the table-cloth on the heather, and brought forth the various viands, one swift glance told him she was not present. Here was a disappointment! He wanted to tell her how he had got on, under her kind instruction—this was his own explanation of the pang her absence caused him; but presently he had found another; for Lady Rosamund was grouping the people for her sketch; and what would the sketch be without Honnor Cunyngham in it? He made bold to say so.

“Oh, you can’t depend on Honnor,” Lady Adela said. “She may have risen a fish, or may have got hold of one. But if you want to know whether she is likely to turn up, you might go out to that point, Mr. Moore, and then you’ll be able to see whether she is coming anywhere near the Bad Step.”

Willingly enough he went down through the scattered birch-trees to a projecting point overlooking the river from a very considerable height; and there, right below him, he discovered what it was they called the Bad Step. The precipice on which he stood going sheer down into the Aivron, the path along the stream left the banks some

distance off, came up to where he stood, and then descended again by a deep gorge probably cut by water-power through the slaty rock. And even as he was regarding this twilit chasm it suddenly appeared to him that there were two figures away down there, crossing the burn at the foot; and then one of them, in grey—unmistakeably the fisher-maiden herself—began the ascent. How she managed to obtain a footing he could not make out; for the path was no path, but merely a zig-zag track on the surface of the loose shingle—shingle so loose that he could see it yield to her every step, while the *débris* rolled away down to the bed of the burn. But still she fought her way upward, and at last she stood face to face with him, smiling, but a little breathless.

“That’s a frightful place to come up,” said he.

“Oh, it’s nothing when you know it,” she said, lightly. “Tell me, how did you get on this morning?”

“Thanks to you, I think I did pretty well,” said he.

“I’m awfully glad of that,” said she; and the soft clear hazel eyes repeated her words in their own transparent way.

“I remembered all your instructions,” he con-

tinued (and he was in no hurry that Miss Cunyng-
ham should go on to the luncheon-party, while old
Robert stood patiently by). "And I was very
fortunate in getting easy shots. Then when I did
miss, either Sir Hugh or Captain Waveney was
sure to get the bird: I never saw such smart
shooting."

"What have you done?"

"Altogether?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. The panniers are being emptied,
to make a show for Lady Rosamund's sketch. I
fancy there are close on sixty brace of grouse,
with some blue hares, and a snipe, and a wild
duck."

"What has Lord Fareborough's party done?"

"I don't know: they have just shown up—so
you needn't hurry on, unless you're hungry."

"But I am—very hungry," said she, with a
laugh. "I have been hard at work all the
morning."

"Oh, in that case," he said, eagerly, "by all
means come along, and I'll get you something at
once. You and I needn't wait for the emptying of
the other panniers. Oh, yes, that will do first-
rate: I'm a duffer at shooting, you know, Miss

Cunyngham, but I'm a splendid forager at a pic-nic. Let me carry the gaff for you."

"Oh, no, thank you," she said, "I merely use it as a walking-stick coming up the Bad Step."

"And there," he exclaimed, as they went on through the birch-wood, "look at the selfishness of men! You ask all about my shooting: but I never asked what luck you had with your fishing."

"Well, I've had rather bad luck," she said, simply. "I lost a fish in the Geinig Pool, after having him on for about five minutes, and I rose another in the Horse-Shoe Pool, and couldn't get him to come again all I could do. But I mean to call upon him in the afternoon."

A sudden inspiration flashed into his brain.

"I should like to come and see you try for him," he said, quickly. "I suppose they wouldn't mind my sending home my gun?"

"Mr. Moore!" she said, with her eyes downcast. "They'd think you were mad to leave a shooting-party on the Twelfth. You can see a salmon caught, or catch one yourself, any time."

He felt a little bit snubbed, he hardly knew why; but of course she knew what was right in all such things; and so he humbly acquiesced. Indeed, he could not contest the point; for now they had

come upon the picnic-party, where luncheon was in full swing. Lord Fareborough had declared on his arrival that he would not wait for the completion of his daughter's sketch; his nervous system was not to be tried in any such fashion; luncheon must be proceeded with at once, and Lady Rosamund could make her drawing when the gentlemen were smoking afterwards. Lady Adela wanted to wait for Mr. Moore, but she, too, was overruled by the impatient hypochondriac. So Lionel set to work to form a seat for Miss Honnor, out of some bracken that the gillies had cut and brought along; and also he exclusively looked after her—to Miss Georgie Lestrangle's chagrin; for Lord Rockminster was too lazy to attend to any one but himself; and what girl likes being waited on by her brother, when other young men are about?

And now the burly and broad-shouldered host of all these people called on them unanimously to forgive the Minister for the injury he had unintentionally done them in the morning.

"It wasn't the good man's fault at all; it was Waveney's," Sir Hugh continued, as he got hold of a spoon and delved it into a pigeon-pie. "I assure you it was a practical joke that Captain Waveney

played upon the whole of you. He gave the Minister a little hint—and the thing was done.”

Lord Fareborough glared at the culprit as if he expected to see the heavens fall upon him; but Lady Adela observed, with a touch of dignity—

“I hope I know Captain Waveney well enough not to believe that he would turn any religious service into a practical joke.”

“I hope so, too, Lady Adela,” the dapper little Captain instantly replied, though without any great embarrassment. “That’s hardly my line of country. But there’s another thing: Sir Hugh may ask you to believe anything, but he won’t make you believe that I could trifle with such a sacred subject as the morning of the Twelfth.”

“Faith, you’re right there, Waveney,” Sir Hugh said, with a laugh. “Well, we’ve done our best to make up for the loss of time. And now, Rose, if you want to have your sketch, fire away! I’m going to light a pipe; but, mind, we shan’t stop here very long. You’d better put in us men at once; and then you can draw in the ladies, and the game, and the luncheon at your leisure.”

“And if you want me, Rose,” Honnor Cunyng-ham said, “please put me in at once, too; for I’m going away back to the Horse Shoe Pool.”

“My dear child,” Lady Adela protested, “you’ll break your neck some day going down that Bad Step. I really think Hugh should have a windlass at the top, and let people down by a rope. Now look alive, Rose, and get your sketch begun: I can see the gentlemen are all impatient to be off. And mind you have Mr. Moore rolling up a cigarette: it won’t be natural otherwise.”

She was right about one thing anyway; the sportsmen were undoubtedly impatient to be off; and it is to be feared that Lady Rosamund’s sketch suffered by the restlessness of her models. Indeed, after a very little while, Lord Fareborough indignantly rose, and declared he never had known a Twelfth of August so shamelessly sacrificed. He, for one, would have no more of it. He called to the under-keeper to bring along the gillies and the dogs; whereupon Lady Rosamund, who had a temper not quite in consonance with the calm and statuesque beauty of her features, closed her sketch-book and threw it aside, saying she would make the drawing some other day when she found the gentlemen a little more considerate.

And soon Lionel and his two companions were at their brisk occupation again; though ever and anon his thoughts would go wandering away to

the Horse-Shoe Pool, and his fancy was picturing the fisher-maiden on the summit of a great grey boulder, while a fifteen-pounder raced and chased in the black deeps below. Sometimes he tried to get a glimpse of the upper stretches of the river ; but this was a dangerous trick when all his attention was demanded by the work on hand. In any case his scrutiny of those far regions was unavailing ; for the Horse Shoe Pool is on the Geinig, a tributary of the Aivron, and not visible from the hill-slopes along which they were now shooting.

The bag mounted up steadily ; for the afternoon, despite the threats of the morning, remained fine and clear and still ; the birds lay close ; and the two outside guns were skilful performers. As for Lionel, he had now acquired a certain confidence ; he took no shame that he reserved himself for the easy shots ; the nasty ones he could safely leave to his companions. At last, as they came in sight of a peaceful little tarn lying under a distant hillock, and could descry two small dots floating on the smooth surface of the water, Sir Hugh said to his head-keeper—

“ See here, Roderick, are those duck or mergansers ? ”

The keeper took a long look before he made reply.

“I’m not sure, Sir Hugh, but I am thinking they are mergansers, for I was seeing two or three lately.”

“Very well, call in the dogs. I’m going to sit down and have a pipe. I suppose you’ll do the same, Mr. Moore—though I must say this for you that you can walk. You have the advantage of youth; and you haven’t as much to carry as I have. Well, I propose we have a few minutes’ rest; and we will occupy ourselves in watching Waveney stalk those mergansers. There’s a job for you, Waveney. They are the most detestable birds alive to have near a forest or a salmon-stream.”

“Why, what harm can they do to the salmon?” Lionel asked, as he saw Captain Waveney at once change the cartridges in his gun for No. 4’s, and set off down the hill-side.

“They snap up the parr, of course,” said his heavy-shouldered host, as he drew out a wooden pipe and a pouch of black Cavendish, “but that isn’t the worst: they disturb the pools most abominably—swimming about under water they frighten the salmon out of their senses. But when you get them about a deer-forest they are a still more intolerable nuisance; you are never safe; just as you are getting up to the stag, creep-

ing along the course of a burn, perhaps, bang! goes one of those brutes like a sky-rocket, and the whole herd are instantly on the alert. Oh, that's a job old Waveney likes well enough; and it will give the dogs a rest as well as ourselves."

By this time the stalker had got out of sight. He was making a considerable detour so as to get round by the back of the hillock unobserved; and when he came into view again, he was on the other side of the valley. The mergansers, if they were mergansers, were still swimming about unsuspectingly, though sometimes at a considerable distance apart.

"Does Miss Cunyngham shoot as well as fish?" Lionel ventured to ask.

"She has tried it," her brother said, as he called up Roderick, and gave him a dram out of his capacious flask. "And I think she might shoot very well; but she doesn't care about it. It is too violent, she says. The sudden bang disturbs the charm of the scenery—something of that kind—I'm not up in these things; but she's an odd kind of girl. Tremendously fond of quietude and solitude; we've found her in the most unexpected places—and there *are* some lonely places about these hills. I tell her she shouldn't go on these

long excursions without taking old Robert with her : supposing she were to sprain her ankle—she might have to remain there all night and half the next day before we could find her. Sooner or later I know she'll startle some solitary shepherd out of his senses : he'll come back to his hut swearing that he has seen a Grey Lady where no mortal woman could be. Hullo, there's Waveney again—he'll soon be on them."

They could see him stealing across the top of the hillock, and then making his way down behind certain rocks that served as a screen between him and the birds. Then he disappeared again.

"Why doesn't he fire?" Lionel asked presently. "He must be quite close to them."

"Not so close as you imagine," was the answer. "Probably he is waiting until they come nearer together."

The next moment there stepped boldly forth the slight brown figure ; the birds instantly rose from the water, and with swift straight flight made down the valley ; but they had not got many yards when there were two white puffs of smoke, both birds almost simultaneously came tumbling to the ground, and then followed the double report of a gun.

“Waveney has got his eye in to-day for certain,” Sir Hugh said. “But what’s the use of his bringing the birds along?—they’re no good to anybody.”

“I thought perhaps they might be of some use for salmon-flies,” Captain Waveney explained, as he came up. “Aren’t they, Roderick?”

The keeper regarded the two birds contemptuously, and shook his head.

“Well, Waveney, we will give you five minutes’ grace, if you like,” Sir Hugh said. “Sit down and have a pipe.”

But this slim and wiry warrior had not even taken the gun from his shoulder.

“No, no,” said he, “if you are ready, I am. I can get plenty of smoking done in the South.”

So they began again: but the afternoon was now on the wane, and the beats were leading them homewards. Only two small incidents that befell the novice need mentioning. The first happened in this wise: the dogs were ranging widely over what appeared to be rather a barren beat, when suddenly one of them came to a dead point a considerable distance on. Of course Captain Waveney and Sir Hugh hurried forward; but Lionel could

not, for he had got into trouble with a badly jammed cartridge. Just as he heard the first shot fired, he managed to get the empty case extracted and to replace it with a full one; and then he was about to hasten forward when he saw the covey rise—a large covey it was—while Captain Waveney got a right and left, and Sir Hugh fired his remaining barrel, for he had not had time to reload. At the same instant Lionel found that one of the birds had doubled back and was coming right over his head: up went his gun; he blazed away; and down rolled the grouse some dozen yards behind him.

“Well done!” Sir Hugh called out. “A capital shot!”

“A ghastly fluke, Sir Hugh!” Lionel called out in return. “I simply fired in the air.”

“And a very good way of firing too!” was the naif rejoinder.

But his next achievement was hardly so creditable. They were skirting the edge of a birch-wood that clothed the side of a steep precipice overlooking the Aivron, where there were some patches of bracken among the heather, when the setter in front of him—a young dog—began to draw rather falteringly on to something.

“Ware rabbit, Hector!” the keeper said, in an undertone.

But meanwhile the older dog, that was backing in front of Captain Waveney, whether it was impatient of this uncertainty on the part of its younger companion, or whether it was jealous, managed unobserved to steal forward a foot or two, until suddenly it stopped rigid.

“Good dog, Iris, good dog!” Captain Waveney said (for he had overlooked that little bit of stealthy advance), and he shifted his gun from his right hand to his left, and stooped down, and patted the animal’s neck—though all the time he was looking well ahead.

Then all at once there was a terrific whirr of wings; Waveney quickly put his gun to his shoulder—paused—took it down again; at the same moment Lionel, finding a bird within his proper field, as he considered—though it was going away at a prodigious speed—took steady aim and fired. That distant object dropped—there was not a flutter. Of course the keeper and Sir Hugh were still watching the young dog; but when this doubtful scent came to nothing, Sir Hugh turned to Lionel.

“That was a long shot of yours, Mr. Moore,” said he. “And very excusable.”

“Excusable?” said Lionel, wondering what he had done this time.

“Of course you knew that was a greyhen?” the other said.

“A greyhen?” he repeated.

“Didn’t you hear Roderick call out? Didn’t you see Waveney put up his gun and then take it down?”

“Neither the one nor the other; I only saw a bird before me—and fired.”

“Oh, well, there’s no great harm done: if a man has no worse sin on his conscience than shooting a greyhen on the Twelfth, he should sleep sound o’ nights. Waveney is fastidious. I dare say if the bird had come my way, I should not have resisted the temptation.”

Lionel considered that Sir Hugh was an exceedingly considerate and good-natured person; and in fact when they picked up the dead bird, and when he was regarding its sober plumage, it cannot fairly be said that he was much surprised at his venial mistake. Only he considered he was bound in honour to make confession to Miss Cunyngham.

Alas! he was to see little of Miss Cunyngham that night. As soon as dinner was over—and Sir

Hugh and his satellite had left the dining-room to enter up the game-book, write labels for special friends, and generally finish up the business of the day—Lady Adela proposed a game of Dumb Crambo; and in this she was heartily backed up by the Lestranges, for Miss Georgie seemed to think that the mantle of Kitty Clive had descended upon her shoulders, while her brother evidently regarded himself as a facetious person. Speedily it appeared, however, that there was to be a permanent and stationary audience. Lord Fareborough—especially after dinner, when his nervous system was still in dark deliberation as to what it meant to do with him—was too awful a personage to be approached; Honnor Cunyngham good-humouredly said that she was too stupid to join in; and Lord Rockminster declared that if that was her excuse, it applied much more obviously to himself. Accordingly, the remaining members of the house-party had to form the entertainers; and never had Lionel entered into any pastime with so little zest. These people could not act a bit; and yet he had to coach them; and then he and they had to go into the drawing-room and perform their antics before that calm-browed young lady (who nevertheless regarded the proceedings with the

most friendly interest) and her companion, the stolid young lord. He could not help acknowledging to himself that Miss Honnor Cunyngham and Lord Rockminster formed a remarkably handsome couple as they sate together there on a couch at right angles with the fireplace; but the distinguished appearance of the audience did not console him for the consciousness that the performers were making themselves absurd. He was impatient, ashamed, of the whole affair. Dark and sullen thoughts went flashing through his brain of saving up every penny he could get hold of and going away into some savage wilderness in Ross or Sutherland, to be seen of actors and amateurs no more. His gun and his rod would be his sole companions; his library would consist of St. John, Colquhoun, 'Stonehenge,' and Francis (not of Assisi); by moor and stream he would earn his own subsistence; and theatres, and fashionable life, and the fantastic aspirations and ambitions of *les Précieuses Ridicules* would be banished from him for ever. But fortunately a nine o'clock dinner had driven this foolish entertainment late, so that it did not last long; the ladies were unanimously willing to retire; the gentlemen thereupon trooped off to the gunroom

to have a smoke and a glass of whisky and soda-water; and very soon thereafter the deep-breathing calm of the whole household told that the labours of the Twelfth were over.

CHAPTER IX.

VENATOR IMMÉMOR.

AND why was it, when in course of time it became practicable to arrange a deer-stalking expedition for him, why was it that he voluntarily chose to encounter what Lord Rockminster had called the very extremes of fatigue and human misery? He knew that he was about to undergo tortures of anxiety and privation; and, what was worse, he knew he was going to miss. He had saturated his mind with gillies' stories of capital shots who had completely lost their nerve on first catching sight of a stag. The "buck-ague" was already upon him. Not for him was there waiting away in those wilds some Muckle Hart of Ben More to gain a deathless fame from his rifle-bullet. He was about to half-kill himself with the labours of a long and arduous expedition, and at the end of it he foresaw himself returning home defeated,

dejected, in the deepest throes of mortification and chagrin.

And look what he was giving up. Here was a whole house-full of charming women all ready to pet him and make much of him; and in their society he would be at home, dealing with things with which he was familiar. Lady Sybil would be grateful to him if he helped her with the music she was arranging for "Alfred: a Masque;" he could be of abundant service, too, to Lady Rosamund, who was now making individual studies for her large drawing of "Luncheon on the Twelfth;" though perhaps he could not lend much aid to Lady Adela, who was understood to be getting on very well with her new novel. But at all events he would be in his own element; he would be among things that he understood; he would be no trembling ignoramus adventuring forth into the unknown. And yet when early in the morning the old and sturdy pony was brought round to the door, and when the brown-bearded Roderick had shouldered the rifle and was ready to set forth, Lionel had little thought of surrendering his chance to any one else.

"I call this very shabby treatment," his burly and good-humoured host said, as he stood at the

open door. "When a man goes stalking, if there's a pretty girl in the house, she ought to make her appearance and give him a little present for good luck. It's an understood thing; it's an old custom; and yet there isn't one of those lazy creatures down yet."

"This is the best I can do for you, old fellow," Percy Lestrangle said at the same moment. "I can't give you the flask, for my sister Georgie gave it to me; but I will lend it to you for the day; and it's filled with an excellent mixture of curaçoa and brandy. You'll want some comfort; and I don't expect they'll let you smoke. What do you think of my crest?"

He handed the silver flask to Lionel, who found engraved on the side of it a merry and ingenious device consisting of two briar-root pipes, crossed, and surrounded by a heraldic garter bearing the legend "*Dulce est de-sip-ere in loco?*" Was this Miss Georgie's little joke? Anyhow he pocketed the flask with much gratitude; he guessed he might have need of it, if all tales were true.

"I hope you'll get a presentable head," Sir Hugh said. "The stags themselves are not in very good condition yet; but the horns are all right—the velvet's off."

"It doesn't much matter," Lionel made answer, contentedly. "I know beforehand I am going to miss. Well, good-bye, for the present! Go ahead, Maggie!"

But at the same moment there was a glimmer of a grey dress in the twilight of the hall; and the next moment Honnor Cunyngham appeared on the doorstep, the morning light shining on her smiling face.

"Mr. Moore," she said, coming forward without any kind of embarrassment, "there's an old custom—didn't my brother tell you?—you must take a little gift from some one in the house, just as you are going away, for good luck. You haven't yet? Here it is, then."

"It is exceedingly kind of you," said he, "and I wish I could make the omen come true; but I have no such hope. I know I am going to miss."

"You are going to kill a stag!" said she, confidently. "That is what you are going to do. Well—good-bye, and good luck!"

So the little party of three—Lionel, Roderick, and the attendant gillie—straightway left the lodge, and began to make for the head of the strath. And it was not altogether about deer that Lionel was now thinking. The tiny, thin packet he

held in his hand seemed to burn there. What was it Honnor Cunyngham had brought downstairs for him? However trivial it might be, surely it was something he could keep. She had given it to him for good luck; but her wishes were not confined to this one day? Then, when he had got some distance from the house, so that his curiosity could not be observed, he threw the reins on Maggie's neck, and proceeded to open this small packet covered with white paper. What did he find there?—why, only a sixpence—a bright new sixpence—not to be compared in value with the dozens on dozens of presents which were lavished upon him by his fair admirers in London—courteous little attentions which, it must be confessed, he had grown to regard with a somewhat callous indifference. Only a small bright coin this was; and yet he carefully wrapped up the precious talisman again in its bit of tissue paper; and as carefully he put it away in a waistcoat pocket, where it would be safe even among the rough-and-tumble experiences that lay before him. The day seemed all the happier, all the more hopeful, that he knew this little token of friendly sympathy was in his possession. Ought not a lucky sixpence to have a hole bored in it? He could wear it in

secret, even if she might not care to see it hanging at his watch-chain; and who could tell what subtle influence it might not bring to bear on his fortunes, wholly apart from the stalking of stags? He grew quite cheerful; he forgot his nervousness; he was talking gaily to the somewhat taciturn Roderick, who, nevertheless, no doubt much preferred to find his pupil in this confident mood.

Their course at first lay along the nearer bank of the Aivron; but when they had got away up the strath towards the neighbourhood of the Bad Step—which was of course impassable for the pony—Lionel had to separate from his companions, and ford the river, following up the other side. Fortunately there was not much water in the stream; old Maggie knew her way well enough; and with nothing more than an occasional stumble among the slippery boulders and loose stones they reached the opposite bank in safety. About a mile further up the return-crossing had to be made; but this second ford was shallow and easy; and thenceforward the united party went on together. At last they struck the Geinig; and here a rude track took them away from the valley of the Aivron altogether, into a solitary land of moor and rock.

It was a still and rather louring morning; but yet he did not perceive any gloom in it at all; nay, there was rather a tender and wistful beauty up in this lonely wilderness he was entering. The heavy masses of cloud hung low and brooding over the purple hills; the heavens seemed to be in close communion with the murmuring streams in these otherwise voiceless solitudes; the long undulations were not darkly stained, they only lay under a soft, transparent shadow. Even among the greys and purple-greys of the sky there was here and there a mild sheen of silver; and now and again a pale radiance would begin to tell upon an uprising slope, until something almost like sunlight shone there, glorifying the lichened rocks and the crimson heather. This was one of the days that Honnor Cunyngham loved; and he, too, had got to appreciate their sombre beauty, the brooding calm, the gracious silence, when he went with her on her fishing-expeditions into the wilds. And here was her favourite Geinig—sometimes with tawny masses boiling down between the boulders, sometimes sweeping in a black-brown current round a sudden curve, and sometimes racing over silver-grey shallows; but always with this continuous murmur that seemed to offer a

kind of companionship where there was no other sound or sign of life. And would she be up here later on, he asked himself, with a curious kind of interest? Would she have a thought for the small party that had passed in the early morning and disappeared into the remote and secret fastnesses among those lonely hills? Might she linger on in the evening, in the hope of finding them coming home again—perchance with joyful news? For, after all, this lucky sixpence had buoyed up his spirits; he was not so entirely certain he would miss, if anything like a fair chance presented itself; and he knew that if that chance did offer, he would bring all that was in him to bear on the controlling of his nerves—he would not breathe—his life would be concentrated on the small cleft of the rifle—if his heart cracked in twain the instant after the trigger was pulled.

But these vague and anxious speculations were soon to be discarded for the immediate interests of the moment. They were getting near to the ground—after a sufficiently rough journey of close on eight miles; and now, as they came to the bed of a little burn, Lionel was bidden to descend from his venerable steed; the saddle was taken off; and old Maggie was hobbled, and left to occupy

herself with the fresh sweet grass growing near to the stream.

“Now look here, Roderick,” Lionel said, “I’m entirely in your hands, and mind you don’t spare me. Since I’m in for it, I mean to see it through.”

“When it is after a stag we are, there is no sparing of any one,” said Roderick, significantly, as he took out his telescope. “And you will think of this, sir, that if we are crahling along, and come on the deer without expecting it, and if they see you, then you will lie still like a stone. Many’s the time they will chist stand and look at you, if you do not move; and then slowly, slowly you will put your head down in the heather again, and wait till I tell you what to do. But if you go out of sight quick—ay, so will they.”

At first, as it appeared to Lionel, they went forward with a dangerous fearlessness, the keeper merely using his natural eyesight to search the slopes and corries; but presently he began to go more warily; again and again he paused, to watch the motion of the white rags of cloud clinging to the hill-sides; and occasionally, as they got up into the higher country, he would lie down with his back on a convenient mound, cross one

knee over the other, and, with this rest for his telescope, proceed to scrutinise, inch by inch, the vast prospect before him. There was no more talking now. There was a kind of stealthiness in their progress, even when they walked erect; but it soon appeared to Lionel that Roderick, who went first, seemed to be keeping a series of natural eminences between them and a certain distant tract of this silent and lonely land. It was only a guess; but it accounted for all kinds of circuitous little turns; anyhow there was nothing for him but to follow blindly whither he was led. Of course he kept his eyes open; but there was no sign of life anywhere in this barren wilderness; there was nothing but the empty undulations of heath and thick grass, with sometimes a little tarn coming in sight, and always the further hills forming a sort of solitary amphitheatre along the horizon.

Suddenly Roderick stopped short, and quietly put out his hand to arrest the progress of his companions. Involuntarily they stooped; and he not only did likewise, but presently he was on his back on the heather, with the telescope balanced as before. After a long and earnest scrutiny, he offered the glass to Lionel.

“They’re there,” he said, “but in an ahfu’ bad place for us.”

Eagerly Lionel got hold of the telescope, and tried to balance it as the keeper had done; but either his hand was trembling, or the wind had a purchase on the long tube, or he was unaccustomed to its use: at all events he could make out nothing but nebulous and uncertain patches of colour.

“Tell me where they are,” he said quickly, as he put aside the glass. “I have good eyes.”

“Do you see the grey scar on the hill-side yonder?—then right below that the rocks—and then the open place—can you see them now? Ay, and there’s not a single hind with them——”

“They’re all stags?” exclaimed Lionel, breathlessly.

“Every one,” said Roderick. “And when there’s no hinds with them, it is easier to get at them, for they are not near so wary as the hinds; but that is a bad place where they are feeding the now—a terrible bad place. I’m thinking it is no use to try to get near them there; but they will keep feeding on and on until they get over the ridge; and what we will do now is we will

chist go aweh down wind, and get round to them from anither airt."

Little did Lionel know what was involved in this apparently simple scheme. At first everything was easy enough; for when they had fallen back out of sight of the deer, they merely set forth upon a long walk down wind, going erect, without any trouble. It is true that Lionel in time began to think that the keeper, instead of having the deer in mind, was bent on a pilgrimage into Cromarty or Sutherland, or perhaps towards the shores of the Atlantic; but this interminable tramp was a mere trifle compared with their labours when they began to go up wind again. For now there was nothing but stooping, and crawling, and slouching behind hillocks, up peat-hags, and through marshy swamps; while the heat produced by all this painful toil was liable to a sudden chill whenever a halt was called to enable Roderick to writhe his prostrate figure up to the top of some slight eminence, where, raising his head inch by inch, he once more informed himself of the whereabouts of the deer. There seemed to be no end to this snake-like squirming along the ground and creeping behind rocks and hillocks; in fact they were

now in a quite different tract of country from that in which they had first caught sight of the stags—a much more wild and sombre landscape was this, with precipitous black crags overhanging a sullen and solitary loch that had not a bush or a tree along its lifeless shores. As for Lionel, he fought along without repining. His arms were soaking wet up to the elbows; his legs were in a like condition from his knees downward. Then he was damp with perspiration; while ever and anon, when he had to lie prone in the moist grass, or crouch like a frog behind a rock, the cold wind from the hills sent a shiver down his spine or seemed to strike like an icy dagger through his chest. But he took it all as part of the day's work. There was in his possession a little silver token that afforded him much content. He would acquit himself like a man—if he could; at any rate, he would not grumble.

After what seemed ages of this inconceivable torture, Lionel was immensely relieved to find the keeper—after a careful survey from the top of a mound to which he had crawled—motion with his hand to him to come up to his side. This he did with the greatest circumspection, scarcely raising his head above the grass and heather;

and then, when he had joined Roderick, he began to peer through the waving stalks and twigs just before his eyes. Suddenly his gaze was arrested by certain brown tips—tips that were moving: were these the stags' horns, he asked himself in a kind of bewilderment of fear? There could be no doubt of it. The beasts were now lying down—he could not see their bodies—but clearly enough he could make out their branching antlers, as they lazily moved their heads, or perhaps turned to flick a fly away.

“They're too far off, aren't they?” Lionel whispered—and despite all his sworn resolves to keep calm, he felt his heart going as if it would choke him.

“They're lying down now,” Roderick said, with professional coolness, “and they're right out in the open: it is no use at all trying to get near them until they get up in the afternoon and begin to feed again, and then maybe they will feed over the shoulder yonder. No use at all,” said he; but just at this moment his quick eye caught sight of something else that had just appeared on the edge of one of the lower slopes, and the expression of his face instantly changed—into something like alarm. “Bless me, look at that now!”

Lionel slowly and cautiously turned his head ; and then, quite clearly, he could see a small company of seven or eight stags that had come along from quite a different direction. They paused at the crest of the slope, looking all about them.

“ Was ever anything so mischievous ! ” Roderick exclaimed, in smothered vexation. “ If they come over this way they will get our wind ; and then it is good-bye to all of them. And we cannot get away neither—well, well, was there ever the like now ! There is only the one chance—mebbe they will go along to the others, and keep with them till they begin feeding in the afternoon. Indeed, now, it is a terrible peety if we are to miss such a chance—and not a hind anywhere to be on the watch ! ”

Happily, however, Roderick’s immediate fears were soon dispelled. The newcomers slowly descended the slope ; then they bore up the valley again ; and after walking about a while, they followed the example of the rest of the herd, and lay down on the heather.

“ Ay, ay, that is better now,” Roderick said, with much satisfaction. “ That is ferry well now. And since there is nothing to be done till the whole of

them get up to feed in the afternoon, we will chist creep aweh down into a peat-hag, and wait there, and you can have your lunch, sir."

So there was another crawling performance down from this exposed height; and eventually the small party managed to hide themselves in a black and moist peat-hag, where their extremely frugal repast was produced.

"But look here, Roderick," Lionel said, "it's only twelve o'clock now: do you mean to say we have to stop in this wet hole till two or three in the afternoon?"

"Ay, chist that," the keeper said coolly. "They will begin to feed about three; and until they go over the ridge, it is no use at all trying to get near them."

"And what are we to do all the time?"

"Chist wait," Roderick said, with much simplicity; and then he and the gillie withdrew a little way down the peat-hag, so that they might have their luncheon, and a cautious whispering in Gaelic, by themselves.

It was tantalising in the last degree. The breathless consciousness that the deer were close by made him all the more impatient for the half-dreaded opportunity of having a shot at one of

them. . He wished it was well over. If he was going to miss, he wanted to have his agony of mortification encountered and done with, instead of enduring this maddening delay. The peat-hag became a prison; and a very uncomfortable prison too. His sandwiches were soon disposed of: thereafter—what? He dared not smoke; he had no book with him; the keeper and the gillie, having withdrawn themselves, were exchanging confidences in their native tongue. His clothes were wet and cold and clammy; Percy Lestrangle's flask appeared to afford him no comfort whatsoever. And of course the longer he brooded over the chances of hit or miss, the more appalling became the responsibility. How much depended on that fifteenth part of a second! He was half inclined to say—"Here, Roderick, I can bear this anxiety no longer. Let us get as near the deer as we can; sight the rifle for a long distance, you whistle the stags on to their legs—and I'll blaze into the thick of them. Anything to get the shot over and done with!"

Indeed this intolerable waiting was about as bad a thing as could have happened to his nerves; but it did not last quite as long as the keeper had anticipated; for about two o'clock Roderick ascertained that the stags were up again and feeding.

This was good news—anything was good news, in fact, that broke in upon this sickening suspense: had Lionel been informed that the deer had taken alarm and disappeared at full gallop, he would have said “Amen!” and set out for home with a light heart. But by and by, when it was discovered that the stags had gone over the ridge—one of them remained on the crest for a long time, staring right across the valley, so that the stalkers dared not move hand or foot—when this last sentinel had also withdrawn, the slouching and skulking devices of the morning had to be resumed. Not a word was spoken; but Lionel knew that the fateful moment was approaching. Then, when they began to ascend the ridge over which the stags had disappeared, their progress culminated in a laborious crawl, Roderick going first, with the rifle in one hand, Lionel dragging himself after, the gillie coming on as best he might. It was slow work now. The keeper went forward inch by inch, as if at any moment he expected to find a stag staring down upon him. And at last he lay quite still: then, with the slightest movement of his disengaged hand, he beckoned Lionel to come up beside him.

Now was the time for all his desperate and

summoned calmness. He shut his lips firm, breathing only by his nose; he gradually pushed his way through the tall, withered grass; and at last, when he was almost side by side with Roderick, he peered forward. They were startlingly near, those brown and dun beasts with the branching antlers!—he almost shrank back—and yet he gazed and gazed with a strange fascination. The stags, which were not more than fifty or sixty yards off, were quite unconscious of any danger; they were quietly feeding; sometimes one of them would cease, and raise his head, and look lazily around. Just at this moment, too, a pale sunlight began to shine over the plateau on which they stood; and a very pretty picture it lit up—the silver-grey rocks, the wild heath, and those slim and elegant creatures grouped here and there as chance directed. Every single feature of the scene (as he discovered long thereafter) was burned into Lionel's brain; yet he was not aware of it at the time; his whole attention, as he imagined, was directed towards keeping himself cool and restrained and ready to obey Roderick's mute directions. The rifle was stealthily given to him, and as stealthily pushed through the grass. With his forefinger the keeper indicated the stag at which Lionel was

to fire: it was rather lighter in colour than the others, and was standing a little way apart. Lionel took time to consider, as he thought; in reality it was to still the quick pulsation of his heart; and as he did so the stag, unfortunately for him, moved, so that instead of offering him an easy broad-side shot, it almost faced him, with its head down. Still, at any moment it might afford a fairer mark; and so, with the utmost caution, and with his lips still shut tight, he slowly raised himself somewhat, and got the rifle into his hands. Yes, the stag had again moved: its shoulder was exposed: his eyes inquired of Roderick if now was the time: and the keeper nodded assent.

The awful crisis had arrived; and he seemed to blind himself and deaden himself to all things in this mortal world except the little notch in the rifle, the shining sight, and that fawn-coloured object over there. He took a long breath; he steadied and steadied the slightly-trembling barrel until it appeared perfectly motionless; and then—he fired.

Alas! at the very moment when he pulled the trigger—when it was too late for him to change his purpose—the stag threw up its head to flick at its side with its horns, and thus quite altered its

position ; he knew he ought not to fire—but it was too late—too late—and in the very act of pulling the trigger he felt that he had missed.

Roderick sprang to his feet ; for the deer, notwithstanding that they could not have discerned where the danger lay, with one consent bounded forward, and made for a rocky defile on the further side of the plateau.

“Come on, sir ! Come on, sir !” the keeper called to Lionel. “You’ve hit him. Come along, sir !”

“I haven’t hit him—I missed—missed clean !” was the hopeless answer.

“I tell ye ye’ve hit him !” the keeper exclaimed. “Run, sir, run !—if he’s only wounded he may need the other barrel. God bless me, did ye not hear the thud when the ball struck ?”

Thus admonished Lionel unwittingly but nevertheless as quickly as he could followed the keeper ; and he could show a nimble pair of heels when he chose, even when he was hampered with this heavy rifle. Not that he had any heart in the chase. The stag had swerved aside just as he fired ; he knew he must have missed. At the same time any one who goes out with a professional stalker must be content to become as clay in the hands of

the potter; so Lionel did as he was bid: and though he could not overtake Roderick, he was not far behind him when they both reached the pass down which the deer had fled.

And there the splendid animals were still in view—bounding up a stony hill-side some distance off, in straggling twos and threes, and going at a prodigious speed. But where was the light-coloured stag? Certainly not among those brown beasts whose scrambling up that steep face was sending a shower of stones and débris down into the silent glen below.

“I’m thinking he’s no far aweh,” Roderick said, eagerly scanning all the ground in front of them. “We’ll chist go forrit, sir; and you’ll be ready to shoot, for if he’s only wounded, he may be up and off again when he sees us.”

“But do you really think I hit him?” Lionel said, anxiously enough.

“I *sah* him struck,” the keeper said, emphatically. “But he never dropped—no, not once on his knees even. He was off with the best of them; and that’s what meks me think he was well hit, and that he’s no far aweh.”

So they went forward on the track of the herd, slowly, and searching every dip and hollow. For

Lionel it was a period of agonising uncertainty. One moment he would buoy himself up with the assurance that the keeper must know; the next he convinced himself that he had missed the stag clean. Now he would be wondering whether this wide undulating plain really contained the slain monarch of the mists; again he pictured to himself that light-coloured, fleet-footed creature far away in advance of all his companions, making for some distant sanctuary among the mountains.

“Here he is, sir!” Roderick cried, with a quick little chuckle; and the words sent a thrill through Lionel such as he had never experienced in his life before. “No—he’s quite dead,” the keeper continued, seeing that the younger man was making ready to raise his rifle again. “I was thinking he was well hit—and no far aweh.”

At the same moment Lionel had eagerly run forward. With what joy and pride—with what a curious sense of elation—with what a disposition of good-will towards all the world—he now beheld this splendid beast lying in the deep peat-hag that had hitherto hidden it from view! The stag’s last effort had been to clear this gully; but it had only managed to strike the opposite bank with its fore-feet when the death-wound did its work, and then

the hapless animal had rolled back with its final groan into the position in which they now found it. In a second, Roderick was down in the peat-hag beside it, holding up its head by one of the horns, and examining the bullet-mark.

“Well, sir,” said he, with a humorous smile that did not often lighten up his visage, “if this is what you will be calling the missing of a stag, it is a ferry good way to miss it; for I never sah a better shot in my life.”

“It’s a fluke, then, Roderick: I declare to you I was certain I had missed,” said he—though he hardly knew what he was saying: a kind of bewilderment of joy possessed him—he could not keep his eyes off the dead stag—and now, if he had only chanced to notice it, his hand was certainly trembling! Probably Roderick did not know what a fluke was: in any case his response was——

“Well, sir, I’m chist going to drink your good health; ay, and more good luck to you, sir; and it’s ferry glad I am that you hef got your first stag!”—and therewith he pulled out his small zinc flask.

“Oh, but you mustn’t draw on your own supplies!” Lionel exclaimed in the fulness of his pride and gratitude. “See, here is a flask filled

with famous stuff. You take it—you and Alec : I don't want any more to-day."

"Do not be so sure of that," the keeper said, shrewdly, and he modestly declined to take Percy Lestrangle's decorated flask. "It's a long weh from home we are ; far longer than you think ; and mebbe there will be some showers before we get back."

"I don't care if there's thunder and lightning all the way!" Lionel cried, gaily. "But I'll tell you what, Roderick, I wish you'd lend me your pipe. Have you plenty of tobacco? A cigarette is too feeble a thing to smoke by the side of a dead stag. And—and on my way south I mean to stop at Inverness, and I'll send you as much tobacco as will last you right through the winter ; for you see I'm very proud of my first stag—and of course it was all owing to your skill in stalking——"

Roderick handed the young man his pipe and pouch.

"Indeed you could not do better, sir, than sit down and hef a smoke, while me and Alec are gralloching the beast. Then we'll drag him to a safe place, and cover him up with heather, and send for him the morn's morning."

“Couldn’t you put him on the pony and take him down with us? I can walk,” Lionel suggested: for had he not some dim vision in his mind of a triumphal procession down the strath, towards the dusk of the evening, with perhaps a group of fair spectators awaiting him at the door of the lodge?

“Well, sir,” the keeper made answer, as he drew out his gralloching knife, “you see, there’s few things more difficult than to strap a deer on the back of a powny when there’s no proper deer-saddle. No, sir, we’ll just leave him in a safe place for the night, and send for him in the morning.”

“And do you call that a good head to get stuffed, Roderick?” the young man asked—still gazing on his splendid prize.

“Aw, well, I hef seen better heads, and I hef seen worse heads,” the keeper said evasively. “But the velvet is off the horns whatever.”

This was tremendously strong tobacco that Roderick had handed him, and yet, as it seemed to him, he had never smelt a sweeter fragrance perfuming the soft mountain air. Nor did these appear grim and awful solitudes any longer; they were friendly solitudes, rather; as he sate and

peacefully and joyously smoked, he studied every feature of them—each rock, and swamp, and barren slope, every hill and corrie and misty mountain-top; and he knew that while life remained to him he would never forget this memorable scene—with the slain stag in the foreground. No, nor how could he ever forget that wan glare of sunlight that had come along the plateau where the deer were quietly feeding?—he seemed to see again each individual blade of grass close to his face, as well as the noble quarry that had held him breathless. And then he took out the bright little coin: surely Honnor Cunyngham could not object to his wearing it, seeing that it had proved itself such a potent charm? He rejoiced that he had not been frightened off his expedition by tales of its monotonous sufferings and dire fatigues. This was something better than arranging an out-of-door performance for a parcel of amateurs! Stiff and sore he was, his clothes were mostly soaked and caked with mire, and he did not know what he had not done to his shins and knees and elbows; but he did not mind all that; Honnor Cunyngham was right—as he rode down Strath-aivron that evening towards the lodge, it would not be of fatigues and privations he would be

thinking!—it would be of the lordly stag left away up there in the hills, to be sent for and brought down in triumph the next day.

By the time they had got the stag conveyed to a place of concealment, and carefully covered over with heather, the afternoon was well advanced; then they set out for the little corrie in which the pony had been left. But Lionel was now to discover that they had come much further into these wilds than he had imagined: indeed, when they at length came upon the stolid and unconcerned Maggie, he did not in the least regret that it was a riding-saddle, not a deer-saddle, they had brought with them in the morning. He had offered to walk these remaining eight miles in order to have the proud satisfaction of taking the stag home with them; now he was just as well content that it was he, and not the slain deer, that Maggie was to carry down to Strathaivron. So he lit another cigarette, got into the saddle, and with a light heart set forth upon the long and tedious jog-jog down towards the regions of comparative civilisation.

Yet it was hardly so tedious, after all. He was mentally going over again and again every point and incident of the day's thrilling experiences;

and now it seemed as if it were a long time since he had been squirming through the heather, with all his limbs aching, and his heart ready to burst. He recalled that beautiful picture of the stags feeding on the lonely plateau; he wondered now that he was able to steady the rifle-barrel until it ceased to be tremulous; he asked himself whether he had not in reality pulled the trigger just before the stag swerved its head aside. And what would have been his feelings now, supposing he had missed? Riding home in silence and dejection—trying to account for the incomprehensible blunder—fearing to think of what he would have to say to the people at the lodge. And he was not at all sorry to reflect that, as soon as the little party got back home, Miss Honnor Cunyngham should see for herself that he, a mere singer out of comedy-opera, was not afraid to face the hardships that had proved too much for Lord Rockminster—yes, and that he had faced them to some purpose.

Very friendly sounded the voice of the Geinig, when it first struck upon his ear; they were getting into a recognisable neighbourhood now; here were familiar features—not a waste of the awful and unknown. But it was too much to expect that Miss

Cunyngnam should still be lingering by any of those pools; the evening was closing in; she must have set out for home long ago, fishing her way down as she went. They passed a shepherd's solitary cottage: the old man came out to hear the news—which was told him in Gaelic. They reached the banks of the Aivron, and trudged along under the tall cliffs and through the scattered birch and hazel. Then came the fording of the river—the tramp along the other side—the return ford—and the small home-going party was re-united again. They skirted the glassy sweeps of the Long Pool, the darker swirls of the Small Pool, and the saffron-tinted masses of foam hurling down between the borders of the Rock Pool; and then at last they came in view of the spacious valley, and far away in the midst of it Strathaivron Lodge.

Had they been coming back with bad news this might have been rather a melancholy sight, perhaps—the long, wide strath with the wan shades of twilight stealing over the meadows, and the woods, and the winding river; but now (to Lionel at least) it was nothing but beautiful. If the glen itself looked ghostly and lifeless and colourless, there were warmer hues overhead; for a pale salmon-flush still suffused the sky; and where that

half-crimson glow, just over the dark, heather-stained hill, faded into an exquisite transparent lilac, there hung a full moon—a moon of the lightest and clearest gold, with its mysterious continents appearing as faint grey films. The prevailing peace seemed to grow more profound with the coming of the night. But this was not a night to be feared—this was a night to be welcomed—a night with that fair golden moon hanging high in the heavens, the mistress and guardian of the silent vale.

When Lionel rode up to the door of the lodge, he found all the gentlemen of the house congregated there, and dressed for dinner. Sir Hugh held up his hand.

“No, not one word!” he cried. “Not necessary. I can always tell. It is written in every line of your face.”

“It isn’t a hind, is it?” inquired Lord Rockminster, doubtfully.

“A hind of ten points!” Lionel said, with a laugh, as he pushed his way through. “Well, I must see if I can have a hot bath to soften my bones——”

“My good fellow, it’s waiting for you,” his host said. “I told Jeffreys the moment I saw you

coming down the strath. We'll put back dinner a bit ; but be as quick as you can."

At the same moment there appeared a white-draped figure on the landing above, leaning over the balustrade.

"What have you done, Mr. Moore?" called down the well-known voice of Honnor Cunyngham.

"I've got a stag," he said, looking up with a good deal of satisfaction—or gratitude, perhaps?—in his eyes.

"How many points?"

"Ten."

"Well done! Didn't I tell you you would get a stag?"

"It's all owing to the lucky sixpence you gave me," he said; and she laughed as she turned away to go to her room.

After a welcome bath he dressed as quickly as he could for dinner—dressed so quickly, indeed, that he thought he was entitled to glance at the outside of the pile of letters awaiting him there on the mantel-piece. He had a large correspondence, from all kinds of people; and when he was in a hurry this brief scrutiny of the address was all he allowed himself; he usually could tell if there was anything of unusual importance. On the present

occasion the only handwriting that arrested him for a second was Nina's; and some sort of half-understood compunction made him open her letter. Well, it was not a letter; it was merely a little printed form, such as is put about the stalls and boxes of a theatre when an announcement has to be made. This announcement read as follows—
'NOTICE: *In consequence of the sudden indisposition of Miss BURGOYNE the part of "Grace Mainwaring" will be sustained this evening by Miss ANTONIA ROSS.*'—while above these printed words Nina had written in a rather trembling hand: *'Ah, Leo, if you were only here to-night!'* Apparently she had scribbled this brief message before the performance; perhaps haste, or nervousness, might account for the uncertain writing. So Nina was to have her great opportunity after all, he said to himself, as he went joyfully down stairs to join the brilliant assemblage in the drawing-room. Poor Nina!—he had of late almost forgotten her existence.

END OF VOL. I.

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